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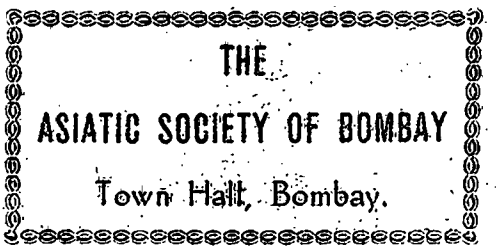

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SERMONS

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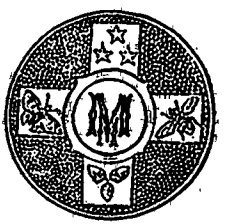

SERMONS

PREACHED BEFORE THE UNIVERSITY OF OXFORD

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BY

R. W. CHURCH, M.A.

LATE FELLOW OF ORIEL; RECTOR OF WHATLEY

O Sapientia quae ex ore Altissimi prodisti attingens a fine usque ad finem fortiter suaviterque disponens omnia: veni ad docendum nos viam prudentiae.

BC36

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NOTICE.

THE following sermons were preached in the writer's turns as Select Preacher at St. Mary's, in 1866–1868.

They touch, but only touch, without any pretension to system, and most inadequately, a subject of deep interest and importance—the relations between Christianity and the ideas and facts of modern civilised society. It is a subject which has already engaged the attention of serious and powerful minds, both in this country and abroad[a]. But it has not yet been worked out; and a great service will be done to our generation by any one who can grasp its leading truths, and do justice to its difficult problems.

July, 1868.

[a] See Preface to Guizot's *Méditations sur la Religion Chrétienne dans ses Rapports avec l'état actuel des Sociétés et des Esprits*. Paris, 1868.

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SERMON I.

THE GIFTS OF CIVILISATION.

1 COR. xii. 31.

Covet earnestly the best gifts: and yet shew I unto you a more excellent way.

BY these 'best gifts' St. Paul meant the miraculous endowments which attended that outpouring of the Spirit in which Christianity as a distinct religion began. Nothing can be more astonishing, yet nothing more natural, than his picture of the feelings and behaviour of those who found themselves in possession of these spiritual powers. The gifts were novelties. The subject which received them and had to use them, and was influenced by the consciousness of their presence and the sight of their effects, was that human nature which had long formed its habits of dealing with whatever enlarged its capacities

and its sphere of action, and whose deportment under this sudden change of condition might be predicted from an old and sure experience. What came to pass at Corinth, strange as it seems at first sight, was in reality no more than there was reason to expect. Speaking of what he saw on a large scale, the Apostle describes men thrown off their balance and carried away by feeling their natural faculties transformed and exalted under that Divine influence which was pervading the Christian Church. The purpose was lost sight of in their keen appreciation of the instrument, and in the personal satisfaction of possessing and using it; and St. Paul's words disclose a state of feeling more absorbed by the interest of a new and strange endowment than impressed by the awfulness of its immediate source and the responsibilities of having been called to hold it. Side by side with gifts from heaven and 'powers of the world to come,' were the levity and frivolity of man, surprised and dazzled, measuring them by his own scale, pressing them into the service of his vanity;—

childish delight in a new acquisition; childish insensibility, childish excitement, childish display, childish rivalries, mistaking the place and worth of the gifts themselves, altering their intended proportions, inverting their end and intention. This was the disorder which the Apostle had to redress. In these chapters he bids the Corinthian Christians remember the source and the reason of this distribution of varied gifts. He recalls them from their wild extravagance and selfish thoughtlessness, to soberness and manliness, and a recollection of the truth. 'Brethren, be not children in understanding: be babes in wickedness, but in sense, grown men.' Claiming a use for every gift in its own place, he bids them set on each its right comparative value. He corrects their estimate, and urges them to measure, not by personal considerations, but by larger and nobler ones of the general benefit. 'Forasmuch as ye are zealous of spiritual gifts, seek that ye may abound to the edifying of the Church.' Their eagerness was roused at the sight of the new powers which the kingdom of God

had brought with it into the world; and St. Paul does not discourage their eagerness. Only, he warns them to direct their zeal wisely, and to be eager about the greatest and best: 'Covet earnestly the best gifts,' those which may serve most widely the good of the whole body, those which influence most fruitfully the ends for which it exists.

Yet—as he interrupts himself to add—there is even a higher point of view than this. It is good to 'covet earnestly the best gifts.' It is good to wish to be entrusted with those high gifts which are the fruits of the Lord's ascension and reign. It is good to be intent on their exercise, intent on the great purpose for which they were bestowed, anxious to push them to their full effect. Yet the subject has to be lifted to a higher level still. There is something greater than the greatest of gifts—than wisdom in the choice of them, zeal in their exercise, usefulness in their results. When we are speaking of how Christians ought to feel and act, it is a maimed view which leaves out that which is the characteristic spring

of Christian action, the principle which covers all cases, the 'new commandment' which is to be henceforward the quickening spirit of all morality. 'Covet earnestly the best gifts: and yet shew I unto you a more excellent way.' And then he goes on to give that description of charity—charity in contrast with the greatest powers and most heroic acts,—charity, as the root of all the strength and all the charm of goodness,—charity, as the one essential and ever-growing attribute of the soul amid the provisional and transitory arrangements of this present state—which has made the thirteenth chapter of this Epistle one of the landmarks of man's progress in the knowledge of truth and right.

I hope it is not disrespectful handling of the words of our great teacher to pass from the occasion which so deeply stirred his thoughts to the actual conditions and necessities amid which our own life is placed, and to see in what he wrote about spiritual gifts now passed away a meaning in relation to very different circumstances, which were beyond his range of view,

and which he could not anticipate. We have long been accustomed to accept, in theory at least, the principle laid down by another apostle: 'Every good gift and every perfect gift,' writes St. James, 'is from above, and cometh down from the Father of Lights, with whom is no variableness neither shadow of turning.' It is not, then, I trust, forcing the language of St. Paul or desecrating it, to apply his words to what he was not directly thinking of; to apply them in the most extended sense to all the powers with which men have been endowed; to make the words of apostolic truth and soberness stretch beyond the temporary interest of the religious question with which he dealt, to the universal interests of human society, which is not indeed co-extensive with the Church, but which the Church was founded to embrace and restore, and St. Paul preached his gospel to fill with light and hope. Those awful gifts, which were at once the privilege and the snare of the Christians whom St. Paul had immediately to teach, have passed away; they were of their

age; they did their work; they left their results behind. But God's wonderful gifts to man are not gone. They are as real, as manifest, as operative, as ever. In what surrounds us in that condition of society in which we are actually passing our life, we see a world fuller of gifts—in one very real sense spiritual gifts of God—than was the Church of Corinth. 'Covet earnestly the best gifts,' the 'greater' ones, the higher: 'and yet shew I unto you a more excellent way.' In these words St. Paul seems at once to put his sanction on all the great results of human civilisation, and at the same time to open a wider view beyond it, and to claim for man a higher end and a higher law of life, than even it can give.

I use the word 'civilisation,' for want of a better, to express all that trains and furnishes man for that civil state which is his proper condition here: all skill, and endeavour, and achievement, all exercise and development of thought, restricted to the sphere of present things; the high and improving organisation of

society, primarily for the purposes of the present life. The contrast has often struck observers, and has been drawn out by some of the deepest as well as of the most superficial, between civilisation and the religion of the New Testament; and it often makes itself felt secretly and importunately, even where the feeling is not avowed or suffered to come to light. It is true that civilisation and religion have worked together, have acted on one another and produced joint results; but in their aims and in their nature they are distinct, and may be, as they have been before now, in a right cause or a wrong, arrayed in opposition to one another. And it cannot be denied that minds strongly under the influence of the one, and keenly appreciating its vast relations, are apt to fear or shrink from the other. From the religious point of view, and where religious impressions are clear and paramount, it seems often strange—I do not say always as a matter of conscious reflection, but of unexplained distaste and wonder—to see men giving their lives to business, or science, or

political life, the pursuits which civilisation cherishes and which advance it. We are all of us perforce embarked in it; we all use and enjoy it and profit by it: and yet uneasy misgivings about it come upon us from time to time; we are suspicious about its tendencies and jealous of its claims; and the things we do every day, and feel satisfied that they are right for us to do, we sometimes find it hard to reconcile with the deeper and more uncompromising of the religious views of life. And as civilisation grows more powerful and self-sustained, more comprehensive in its aims, more sure of its methods and perfect in its work, we must not be surprised if there grows with it, among those in whom its influence is supreme, distrust and impatience of religion. There have always been religious despisers of civilisation, and they have sometimes been its revilers. And there have been, and always will be, those who would raise it to an exclusive supremacy, the substitute for religion, and destined to clear away that which it replaces. But this supposed antagonism is

but one of the many reminders to us of our own weakness and narrowness. Civilisation and religion have each their own order, and move in their own path. Perhaps the more clearly we keep in view their distinctness the better. They *are* distinct. But no religious man, at least, can feel difficulty in believing that distinct as they may be, and in the hands of men sometimes opposed, they have essentially one origin, and come both of them from Him who has made man for this world, as well as intended him for another.

We hear civilisation both admired and disparaged by those who do not duly think whence it comes. That great spectacle amid which we live, daily before our eyes, and with so much that we could not do without,—so familiar, yet so amazing when we think of the steps and long strange processes by which it has grown, and the vast results beyond all human anticipation which it has come to; that fruitful elaboration of the best arrangements for the secular wellbeing of man, not material only, not intellectual only,

productive not merely of comfort and light, but goodness; that complex and delicate social machinery, the growth of centuries, and *our* inheritance and possession—let us make all abatements for its defects and inconsistencies, all reserves for its blemishes and drawbacks—yet deserves more respect than it has always received from religious people, as the great work of God's providence and order. The world easily suggests very awful views of its own condition, which we may call overcharged or morbid, but which it is not so easy to answer and get rid of. But the world would indeed be far more dreadful, if we must not see in its civilisation the leading and guiding hand of God, the real gifts of the Author and Giver of all good things. He who gave us the gospel of immortality, He who gave us His Son, gave us also civilisation and its gifts. His gifts are not necessarily dependent one on another, however much they may be allied. It is not necessary to trace all our civilisation up to Christianity; no one can doubt how largely the temporal has been indebted to

the spiritual; but it is true that our civilisation has other sources, wide and ancient ones, besides. Nor do I see why we should be deterred from recognising it as God's work and blessing, because of its sure ill use, by luxury and pride, for impurity and wrong. It is but what happened with the gifts at Corinth; they were foolishly and wrongly used. However our civilisation comes, and however it is used, it is one of God's ways, as real as the sun and air and rain, of doing good to men. Surely a Christian need not be afraid to honour all that is excellent in civilisation, as being, in whatever way, from his own Master, whose awful mind and will is reflected in the universe. Surely he need not be afraid to say that it is not by religion only that tones of goodness are struck from the human soul which charm and subdue us, and that God has yet other ways, secret in working yet undeniable in effect, of bringing out the graces which tend to make men like Himself. The Apostle's call[a]—if I may quote his familiar words

[a] Phil. iv. 8.

in the less familiar but not less forcible Latin version of them—'Quaecumque vera, quaecumque pudica, quaecumque justa, quaecumque sancta, quaecumque amabilia, quaecumque bonae famae, si qua virtus, si qua laus disciplinae, haec cogitate,' finds indeed its deepest and truest response in that faith of which he was the preacher; but shall we say that it finds no true response apart from it and beyond it?

God teaches us about His gifts not only by His word but by His providence; and His providence, working in many ages, has unfolded such a lavish munificence of gifts to men as might well deserve the praises even of an apostle. We are unreal, we talk loosely and deceive ourselves, when we ignore the gifts of our civilised order, in all that they have to amaze us, in all that they do to bless us; or, when profiting by all the appliances with which they furnish us, we speak superciliously of their worth. Civilisation has indeed its dark side—a very dark one: there is much that is dreary and forbidding in the history of its growth; and who can look

without anxiety at the dangers of its future? But the irreligious and worldly tendencies of civilisation are not to be combated by simply decrying it. What it has of good and true tells of its Author too clearly, and bids us accept its benefits and claim them as coming from God, though they do not come directly through religion. Let us look at the world as we know it, with honest but not ill-natured eyes, calmly and fairly, neither as boasters nor as detractors—as those who were put here to 'refuse the evil and choose the good.' Let us not be driven off from the truth, because in the growth of human civilisation there is so much which must make a Christian, or any one who believes in God and in goodness, shudder and tremble. Let us look at it with its terrible concomitant of men made worse by what ought to make them better. Yet look at it as it is. Follow the history of a great people, and consider what it brings forth. Observe that one great fact, the progressive refinement of our human nature, passing unconquerable when once begun,

even through ages of corruption and decline, to rise up again after them with undiminished vigour; keeping what it had gained and never permanently losing; bringing of course new sins, but bringing also new virtues and graces of a yet unwitnessed and unthought-of type. Observe how, as time goes on, men gain in power, —power over themselves; power to bring about, surely and without violence, what they propose; power to have larger aims, to command vaster resources, to embrace without rash presumption a greater field. See how great moral habits strike their roots deep in a society: habits undeniably admirable and beneficial, yet not necessarily connected with the order of things belonging to religion; the deep, strong, stern sense of justice *as* justice; the power of ruling firmly, equitably, incorruptly; the genius and aptitude for law, as a really governing power in society, which is one of the most marked differences of nations, and which some of the most gifted are without; the spirit of self-devoting enterprise, the indifference to privation and to the pain of effort, the

impulses which lead to discovery and peopling the earth with colonies; patriotism and keen public spirit, which some religious theories disparage as heathen, but which no theories will ever keep men from admiring. If nations have what, judging roughly, we call characteristic faults, there grow up in them characteristic virtues; in one the unflinching love of reality, in another the unflinching passion for intellectual truth, in another purity and tenderness, or largeness of sympathy. This is what we see; this, amid all that is so dark and disappointing, has come of God's nurturing of mankind through the past centuries. We can but speak generally; and civilisation has many shapes, and means many things. But let us speak fairly, as we know it. Civilisation *to us* means liberty and the power of bearing and using liberty; it means that which ensures to us a peaceful life, a life of our own, fenced in from wrong and with our path and ends left free to us; it means the strength of social countenance given on the whole to those virtues which make life nobler and

easier; it means growing honour for manliness, unselfishness, sincerity,—growing value for gentleness, considerateness and respect for others; it means readiness to bear criticism, to listen to correction, to see and amend our mistakes; it means the willingness, the passion, to ameliorate conditions, to communicate advantages, to raise the weak and low, to open wide gates and paths for them to that discipline of cultivation and improvement which has produced such fruit in others more fortunate than they. And it has disclosed to us in the course of its development more and more of what is contained in human characters and capacities. We are, in this age, drawing forth with amazement discoveries which seem to be inexhaustible from the treasure-house of material nature. When we cast our eyes back over history and literature, it seems to me that the variety and the disclosures there are as astonishing. Think of the great forms of history, so diversified, so unlike one to another, so unexpected in their traits; think of all that a great portrait-gallery represents, doubtless in but too

rank abundance, of vile and bad, but also of high and venerable, of what the world had never yet known but was never more to forget, of originality, of power, of goodness. The examples of actual history are but part in this great spectacle. Think of what fiction, with all its abuses, has done for us,—creating pictures of character, of infinite novelty and interest, in which imagination reflects the real, endless play of life; multiplying and unfolding for the general knowledge types which would otherwise have been lost where they grew up; think of its world of ideal histories, revealing to man *himself*; showing him with subtle and searching truth things unsuspected or dimly felt, making him understand, better sometimes, as it has been said, than graver teachers, his temptations and self-deceits;—the parables of each generation. Think again what has been bestowed on man in the perfecting of language, its growth and changes, its marvellous acquisition of new powers, in the hands of the great masters who have forged it anew for their thoughts; the double process going on at once

of deepening scientific analysis and continual enlargement by actual use; as in an instrument of music, ever attaining improvement in mechanism, ever, under refined or powerful handling, surprising us with fresh secrets of what it can do. Think of the way in which new faculties, as it were, spring up in us of seeing and feeling, and how soon they are made over to the common stock; how, by art, by poetry, by the commentary of deep and true sympathy and deep and true knowledge, our eyes are more and more opened to discern in new ways the beauty of hill and plain, of sky, or sea, the wonders of the physical universe and their meaning. Think of the wealth that any great literature enshrines of true observation and diversified emotion, and thoughts that live for ever, ever widening and purifying men's minds. Count over all our great possessions. Shall we venture to say that all this does not come from the Source of all beauty and all wisdom and all light—from Him by whom alone the great are great and the good are good? Shall we say

that all these things ought not to excite in men passionate admiration and interest? that men ought not to desire and follow them; to wish to advance the progress and to share in the gifts?

What we see, then, is a profusion, overwhelming to contemplate, of what, if we trace them to their source and author, we must call the gifts of God to man for this life; most varied, most manifold, ever increasing, changing their shape, growing one out of another, unfolding and expanding as new ends appear and shape themselves. It is not wonderful that such a spectacle should win involuntary admiration even from those whose thoughts go most beyond it, and who wish to measure all things here by the measure of Jesus Christ. It is not wonderful, either, that when we come fresh from the New Testament, it should seem too dazzling. But whether or not our thoughts are baffled when we try to embrace God's different ways of working, this we none of us doubt, that all that tends to educate and improve and benefit man comes

from the goodness of the Divine Ruler who guides his fortunes. And what He gives, it is for us to accept and improve. It is an easy thing to say, as has before now been said, *Leave it.* A wiser thoughtfulness, a braver and deeper faith will say *Use it*, only believe that there is something greater beyond. Surely we may hear in the words of the Apostle, not only the warrant, but the call, of his Master, who Himself had not where to lay His head, to take and prize and carry on to its perfection all that His providence has created of so different an order for us, the talent of *our* trial. 'Covet earnestly the greater, the better gifts.' Measure and compare them wisely. Fearlessly choose them, fearlessly give them full play. This is indeed one side of the matter. But there is another and a higher. Covet earnestly what most raises man's part here; what would be to be most desired and followed, even if his part ended here,—but remember also, that besides all this, there is a yet more excellent way. Above God's greatest gifts here, is that which

He is essentially: above them all is charity; for 'God is love.'

'A more excellent way.' It would still, I suppose, be true,—though it would be unaccountable how it should ever have been said,—even if this world were all: it would still be true, that the perfection of character which St. Paul describes under the name of charity is the highest achievement of human nature, and that above knowledge, or power, or great acts, is the unfolding of pure goodness as the universal principle of action. But we believe that this world, with all its wonderful results, is not all. We look forward. And we believe that we have a place in something wider and more lasting. Our ties are not those only of this world, nor the duties we acknowledge, nor the hopes. We believe in the relation of men to God as a Father as well as a Creator, as a Divine Saviour and Guide and Redeemer, as well as the Infinite Cause of all things and the Ruler and Judge of all that is. We believe that we have been told, as far as it concerns us and we could bear

it, the truth about ourselves, and the strange aspect of this world and our condition in it. We believe that all we are brethren, sharers together in a great wreck and disaster, sharers too in a great recovery, even now begun. We believe that *He* has been with us, and of us, who made us, and by whom we live. In Him and from Him, we learnt the mind of God; from Him we know God's value for man, and what God thought it not too much to do that man should be restored to that for which God made him. 'God so loved the world, that He gave His only-begotten Son, that whosoever believeth in Him should not perish, but have everlasting life.' In making Himself known to us, He has not indeed kept out of sight those awful attributes, in virtue of which we, and everything we know and see, are so fearfully and wonderfully made. But that by which He makes us to understand Him and draw near to Him is His love for us. Henceforth the world knows Him irrevocably, if it knows Him at all, in the Cross of Jesus Christ. The world never can be

the same, *after* that, as it was *before* it, as it would be without it. It has brought a new spirit into the world, with a divine prerogative of excellence, to which all other things excellent and admirable must yield the first place. Civilisation runs its great and chequered course, influenced by religion, or independent of it. As great things *have* been done, so still greater may be done, for the wise and just and generous ordering of society, while this life lasts; and what God has given to men to know and to do may be little to what He has yet to give them. Yet after all, henceforth *that* will always be more excellent which comes nearest to the spirit of Jesus Christ. That must always remain for man, ἡ καθ' ὑπερβολὴν ὁδός, the way in which our Master walked, the love in which He lived, and by which His religion lives.

'Covet earnestly the best gifts: and yet shew I unto you a more excellent way.' And then, after having shown the more excellent way, reversing the order of the precept, St. Paul proceeds —'Follow after charity; but covet earnestly the

spiritual gifts.' They were to be prized and coveted by those who were so earnestly taught how far charity was above them. Nor can we prize too much the so different gifts which our own generation sees with wonder increasing upon us. We cannot honour them too sincerely; we cannot set them at too high a rate; we cannot take too much trouble to master all that is true and real in them; we cannot spend ourselves better than in making the world the richer for what God has given us. But when we feel dizzy with the marvellous spectacle around us, carried away with the current of those great changes which with good reason make us hope for so much more for man in his life here, let us remind ourselves that this is not all. There is something else to be thought of besides the objects and pursuits of a successful civilisation. These things are to have their time and service, and then pass away. There are interests beyond them; and each one of us knows *that what he is* reaches beyond them. We are not necessarily growing better men, though we may be

doing a great work, when we are hiving up or dispersing abroad God's manifold gifts of knowledge or ability. And what we are here for is, if anything, to become good; and goodness, since Christ has come, means essentially that spirit of love which joins man to man and lifts him to God. Whatever happens, whatever may be done in reducing this present state to greater reason and order, in drawing forth its resources, in curing its evils, the Cross of Christ is *there*, standing for ever; the Cross of One who came to seek and to save that which was lost, who was among us as 'one that serveth,' our pattern, our warning, in the end our last consolation. For consolation we want at last, be our triumphs what they may. There is no need to colour or overstate. Side by side with our brilliant successes and hopes abide the certain and commonplace conditions of our state, inexorable, unalterable—pain, moral evil, death. Serious and thoughtful men, however much they may be the children and the soldiers of an advancing civilisation, must feel, after all, their

individuality. As one by one they die, so one by one each must live much of his life. And when a man enters into his closet and is still;—if ever, from the glories and the occupations of a great part in the world's business—(I say not from its temptations and entanglements; they need not be this, they may be his proper engagements);—if ever from these he withdraws up into the mount, and in silence and by himself looks in the face his awful destiny, the awful, endless road which lies before him, the purpose for which he was called into being, the law he was meant to live by; when he feels himself confronted alone with the Object of his worship, out of all reach and passing all knowledge, yet the most familiar and customary of all familiar thoughts,—he can hardly help feeling that the gifts of God for this life *are* for this life; they cannot reach beyond; they cannot touch that which is to be. As St. Paul argues, they are incomplete, and they are transitory; they are, compared with what we are to look for, but the playthings and exercises of children; they share our doom of mortality.

There *is* a link which joins this life with the next; there is something which belongs equally to the imperfect and the perfect, and which we carry with us from the one to the other. We know little what will become of our knowledge; we *do* know what will become of our power: one thing only 'never faileth.' The charity which seeks the good of all to whom it can do good; the charity which detects good wherever it is to be found or to be advanced; the charity which opens and enlarges the human soul to conceive, and long for, and set up for its standard, and contemplate with adoring and awful gladness the perfect goodness of God,—that belongs to the world where we are going, when all is over, and, as Christians believe, comes even now *from* that world. *There* is the direction in which we look to be *perfect*; there aspirations are secure against disappointment, and the object is not inadequate to the affection, nor fails it. In the next world, as in this, it is by love that creatures receive and show forth the likeness of their Maker.

There is, then, one great order of things which pertains to the present scene of man's activity; and there is another, not indifferent indeed to the present, but primarily and above all, directed to the future of mankind. In both we have our parts. For the purposes of both God has been lavish in His gifts. We distinguish them, and they are distinguishable in thought and in fact also. But each of us in truth has his part in both; and our life ought to combine them. We ought not to be afraid of God's gifts; we ought not to make as though we saw them not, as we ought not to mistake their place or reverse their order. We are as much bound to be faithful to the full as the stewards of our civilisation as we are responsible for our knowledge of the light and for our gifts of grace. Here especially, what are we *here* for?—we who are connected with this place, or who have ever tasted of its benefits,—what *are* we, or *were* we here for, but to desire earnestly, and seek with hearty effort, and use with fidelity for the service of our brethren, the choice and manifold gifts which

a place like this stores up and distributes? 'Covet earnestly the best gifts.' Surely the gifts which God's providence puts within our reach here are among His higher, His better gifts; surely they are meant to kindle our enthusiasm, to call forth our strong desire, as they awaken the longing of numbers outside of us. When we think of the work and the opportunities of this place—its far-reaching influences, its deep and lasting effects on English society; how here thought and character and faculty are fashioned in those who are to lead thousands of their brethren and control their fate; with what prodigal abundance the means and helps are supplied us by which men may make things better in society, may make things more sound and wholesome and strong; how time is ensured and leisure fenced off from outward calls; what may be learned; how the door of real and large and grounded knowledge is opened to men; how men may train themselves to think and to judge, to discern the true and to choose the best;—indeed we must have dull minds and poor spirits not

to see the great chances given us of work and service, not to be stirred to eager and emulous thoughts about these great gifts. St. Paul is our warrant for being in earnest about them, and our teacher how to use them. 'Covet them earnestly.' Open your eyes to their greatness and charm; remember their purpose, remember their variety. Follow after them,—only do not be children about them; do not idly extol them and vaunt about them; do not be jealous if you have little; do not be proud if you have much: there *are* differences, and *all* have their use; and 'God hath set the members, every one in the body, as it hath pleased Him.' Cultivate, as good servants, your great gifts. Be zealous for great causes which carry in them the hopes of generations to come. Appreciate all that you may find here, to help you to interpret the works and the thoughts of God, to understand yourselves and the world in which you are. But there is something more. Surely there are times to most of us when, in the midst of the splendour and the hopes of visible things, it is with us as the

Psalmist says, 'Like as the hart desireth the water-brooks, so longeth my soul after Thee, O God. My soul is athirst for God, even the living God: when shall I come to appear before the presence of God?' We want a tie and bond deeper than that of society. We want a standard and exemplar above this world. God has placed us to develope our full nature here; but He has placed us here, we believe, still more to become like Himself. So, while learning to understand, to value, to use the last and greatest endowments which the course of things has unfolded in human society, learning to turn them honestly to their best account for the world for which they were given, remember that there is a way for you to walk in which carries you far beyond them, and opens to you even wider prospects, more awful thoughts, a deeper train of ideas and relations and duties which touch us in what is most inward, to the very quick. We are sinners who have been saved by a God who loved us. There is a religion which is our hope beyond this time, and the incommunicable character of

it is love. That which its Author thought necessary to be and to do, for a remedy and comfort to man's misery and weakness—unless man's misery and weakness are a delusion—reveals a love which makes us lose ourselves when we think of it. Love was the perpetual mark of all His life, and of the Act in which His Work was finished. His religion came with a new commandment, which was love. That religion has had great fruits, and their conspicuous and distinctive feature is the love which was their motive and support. Its last word about the God whom it worshipped was, that 'God is love.' It is the Gospel of One, 'who, being in the form of God, thought it not robbery to be equal with God, but made Himself of no reputation, and took upon Him the form of a servant, and became obedient unto death, even the death of the Cross.' 'Let *this* mind be in you, which was in Him,'—love for those made in the image of God and whom God has so loved—love, self-surrendering, supreme, ever growing at once in light and warmth, of

Him who made them. Let us pray that He who has crowned our life here with gifts which baffle our measuring, and which daily go beyond our hopes, but who has 'prepared for them that love Him such good things as pass man's understanding,' would indeed 'pour into our heart such love towards Himself, that we loving Him above all things, may obtain His promises which exceed all that we can desire, through Jesus Christ our Lord.'

SERMON II.

CHRIST'S WORDS AND CHRISTIAN SOCIETY.

ST. MARK X. 21.

Then Jesus beholding him loved him, and said unto him, One thing thou lackest: go thy way, sell whatsoever thou hast, and give to the poor, and thou shalt have treasure in heaven: and come, take up the cross, and follow Me.

THE lessons for this Sunday[a] set before us the Prophet Balaam, that extraordinary character of the Old Testament in whom the experience of modern times has seen the great typical instance of self-deceiving obedience. But he is the type not only of the character which hides the truth from itself, but of that which sees it in vain. Balaam, admiring but unable to believe, looking at the order and beauty of the sacred camp, and plotting to tempt and corrupt; feeling the full grandeur of the spectacle, but able to keep from his heart, though he could not from his intellect

[a] Second Sunday after Easter.

and his lips, the confession that it was Divine,—is the warning we meet with, earlier than we should have expected to find it, against every form of insincere homage to truth and religion.

It seems to me that we must always feel some fear of this danger, when, living as most of us do, we turn to our acknowledged standards of life in the New Testament, and meet with such texts as that which I have just read. We live one kind of life, an innocent, it may be, a useful, improving, religious life; but it is not the life we read of in the New Testament; and yet that life is the one which Christians, in some sense or other, accept as their rule. We honour it, extol it, make our boast of it. But a thinking and honest man must sometimes have misgivings, when he asks himself how far his life in what he deliberately sanctions is like that set before us in the New Testament, and how much of the Gospel morality he is able practically to bring into his own. One lesson taught us by the varied experience, inherited by those on whom the ends of the world are come, is a quickened sense of

the incredible facility of self-deceit. Is there not reason to be anxious, whether, when we own the New Testament as our rule of life, we are not merely making a compromise,—admiring, and not taking the responsibility of our convictions; contemplating the New Testament with perhaps longing, or respectful, or wondering awe, but at an infinite distance from it in spirit and temper?

This is a large subject; and though it is much too large to be dealt with now as it should be, I will venture to say a few words about it this afternoon.

What I mean is this. Here is the New Testament, the confessed source of Christian morality, with its facts and language, about which there is no dispute, and with its spirit and tone equally distinct and marked. And on the other hand, here is the ordinary life of Christian society, with its accepted principles, its familiar habits, its long-sanctioned traditions; the life of Christian society, not particularly in this or that age, but as on the whole it has been from the time

when Christianity won its place definitively in the world; with its legitimate occupations, its interests, its objects, its standards of goodness, of greatness. When we put the two side by side, the mind must be dull indeed which is not conscious of a strong sense of difference and contrast. What does this feeling mean, and to what does it point? So obvious a question has been variously answered; but an answer of some sort is wanted by us all.

The life set before us in the words and deeds of the New Testament is, we all confess, the root of all Christian life. Consider steadily what that was. The life which our Lord led He enjoined: His words are nothing more than generalisations of what He did. It was not that His life had in it difficulties, pain, self-denial, and that He taught men to expect them; all lives have that, and all teaching must arm men for it: but the regular, ordinary course of that life was nothing but hardness, abstinence, separation from society or collision with it. Such a life a great reformer indeed always must go through: others have gone

through it. But here, not to speak of the degree of it, it appears as much imposed on the taught as welcomed by the teacher. He was a King, and announced a kingdom and claimed subjects; but it was a kingdom of heaven not one of earth: and this kingdom and its members, both King and subjects, are represented as in open and deadly enmity with what is called the 'present world[b].' They are few compared with the many; the way is narrow that leads to life, and few find it; they are not to marvel if the world hates them; the blessing is with those whom men revile and speak ill of; the woe is for those of whom all men speak well. We read, how the lesson was learned, how the disciples understood their teacher. 'Be not conformed to this world[c],' says one; 'whosoever will be the friend of this world,' says another, 'is the enemy of God[d];' 'love not the world, neither the things that are in the world,' says another, 'if any man love the world, the love of the Father is not in him[e].'

[b] Gal. i. 4.
[c] Rom. xii. 2.
[d] St. James iv. 4.
[e] 1 St. John ii. 15.

The claim was for undivided allegiance: 'No man can serve two masters; ye cannot serve God and mammon.' And what was our Lord's call? What were His leading maxims? He bids His disciples count the cost, as those who embark in great projects full of risk. '*So likewise* whosoever he be of you that forsaketh not all that he hath, he cannot be My disciple[f].' He warned the multitudes that followed Him, 'If any man come to Me, and hate not his father, and mother, and wife, and children, and brethren, and sisters, yea, and his own life also, he cannot be My disciple[g].' 'One thing thou lackest,' is the answer to the young man who had kept the commandments from his youth, and whom Jesus 'beholding loved'; 'If thou wilt be perfect,' 'go thy way, sell whatsoever thou hast, and give to the poor, and thou shalt have treasure in heaven: and come, take up the cross, and follow Me.' This was no isolated command; it was given in a general form to the whole of the 'little flock': 'Sell that ye have, and give alms;

[f] St. Luke xiv. 33. [g] Ibid. 26.

provide yourselves bags which wax not old, a treasure in the heavens that faileth not[h].' And what He said they did—'they left all and followed Him.' With such a call it is not surprising that there were corresponding precepts. 'Take no thought for the morrow, for the morrow shall take thought for the things of itself;' 'Take no thought for your life, what ye shall eat, neither for the body, what ye shall put on. . . Seek not what ye shall eat nor what ye shall drink, neither be ye of doubtful mind. For all these things the nations of the world seek after; and your Father knoweth that ye have need of these things.' Consider what is involved in these words; how they touch the common occupations of mankind in 'the nations of the world'; what a sweep they made to those who heard them of the most ordinary motives and business of life. True, what came in His way He took; He blessed the marriage-feast at Cana; He refused no invitation from Pharisee or Publican, from rich or poor; He cared so little for the current austerities of

[h] St. Luke xii. 33.

religion, that His enemies could sneer at one whom they called a gluttonous man and a wine-bibber, a 'friend' and 'guest' of sinners. But such passages only throw into stronger relief the general character of His words and life. He who had less a place that He could call His own than the birds which have their nests and the foxes that have their holes, had but stern warnings of judgment for the man who built large barns for his increasing harvests, for those who *have* their reward now, for him who has received his good things here. 'How hardly shall they that have riches'—or, take it in its softened form —'that trust in riches, enter into the kingdom of God.' 'I say unto you, swear not at all.' 'I say unto you, that ye resist not evil; give to him that asketh thee; turn the right cheek to him who has smitten the left; to him that would sue thee at the law for thy coat, give up thy cloke also.' He forbids His disciples to seek high places, to claim their own, to assert their rights. He gives them as their portion slander, misunderstanding, persecution. He breaks their

ties with the world. He scarcely allows them an interest in it, but their work as His delegates. His first followers took Him at His word, and very literally. All his disciples were *called* to follow all this, and they *did* follow it. Their first instinct was to have all things common. The religion taught by St. Paul and St. John is a religion of poverty, with little or no interest in the present life; which submits to violence and ill-usage as a matter of course; which accepts the loosening of family ties; which preaches indulgence without limits, even to seventy times seven, 'as God for Christ's sake hath forgiven'; in which devotion to the unseen, a sense of the citizenship in heaven, fills the thoughts, and throws into the background—ought I not to say into utter insignificance—things visible and temporal. It discourages wealth, and says hard things of the love of money; it is shocked at appeals to law, and holds it far 'more blessed to give than to receive'; it regards industry as a moral remedy against idleness, and riches only as what may be turned into 'the treasure

in heaven[i]'; it contemplates a state of mind in which war between Christians is inconceivable and impossible; it brands ambition and the 'minding of earthly things[k].' I need not say how severely it looked upon mere enjoyment. It was more in earnest against human selfishness than even against what caused human suffering. It seemed to be irreconcilable with litigation and the pursuit of gain, but it did not *seem* to proscribe slavery.

What an astonishing phenomenon would it have appeared to the Christians of the first century, could they have looked forward and seen in vision the Church and Christian society as it was to be, as we know it, and as it has been for the greater part of its history. I do not speak of scandals, of invasions of worldliness, of confessed corruptions. Those were *then* also, and we know must be always. But the change is not only one of fact, but in the general sense of what is right and lawful, in the general view of the conduct of life. Christian society

[i] 1 Tim. vi. 19. [k] Phil. iii. 19.

was *then* almost as separate from the society by which it was surrounded as a ship is from the sea, or a colony in a foreign land from the strangers about it. And now Christianity claims to have possession of society. Not only is the Church no longer opposed, as it then was, to society, but we find a difficulty in drawing the line between them. It seems impossible to conceive three things more opposite at first sight to the Sermon on the Mount, than War, Law, and Trade; yet Christian society has long since made up its mind about them, and we all accept them as among the necessities or occupations of human society. Again, Christianity has been not only an eminently social religion, but a liberal religion. It has been so, not merely from slack indifference, but with its eyes open, and with deliberate reason given to itself for what it did. It has made large allowance for the varieties of character. It has naturalised and adopted in the boldest way (I say this, looking at the general result of what has come to pass, and not forgetting either narrow fears and

jealousies, or very terrible abuses and mischiefs) art, literature, science. It has claimed to have a charm which could take the sting out of them. We educate by the classics, and are not afraid of Shakespeare. We may say, and say truly, that where there is society, these things must be; but Christian society began in the life of the New Testament, and they are not there. In all directions we see instances of the necessities of things enforcing an enlarged interpretation of its language; and we believe that the common sense and instinct of Christians have on the whole caught its true meaning. If this is a compromise, remember that every portion of the Church, every age, every class in it is implicated. Even monastic religion, though it declined society, implied that there was a legitimate form of it, however hard to find, out of the cloister. Even the sect which denounces war and titles has not shrunk from the inconsistency, at least as great, of being rich. We are all involved. We may draw arbitrary lines for ourselves, and say that all outside them shall be called the world. But

these distinctions we do not always recognise ourselves, and no one else does.

It seems to me impossible to exaggerate the apparent contrast between Christian society in its first shape, and that society which has grown out of it; between the Church, as it was at first, called forth out of the world, at open war with it, condemning its morality, rejecting its objects, declining its advantages, in utter antipathy to its spirit—and Christian society as we know it, and live in it, and on the whole take it for granted. The Sermon on the Mount was once taken very literally: it is easy to say, take it literally still, with the Poor Men of Lyons or the Moravians; only then you sacrifice society. So it is easy to say, that it is for a few, that its words are counsels of perfection; only then you sacrifice the universal interest of it: you seem to admit two rules, and lower the whole aim of Christian morality. And it is easy to soften it down and say that it merely inculcates justice, humanity, forgiveness, humility, self-command; only then you are in danger of sacrificing its special

meaning altogether. It is true that it lays down principles; but this does not account for the instances chosen to exemplify the principle. It is not satisfactory to call such language figurative; for nothing can be less figurative than the commands, 'Lay not up treasure on earth,' 'Take no thought for the morrow,' 'Sell all thou hast,' 'Resist not evil.' Such words do indeed embody the spirit of Christian morality; only they do more,—they express what, to those who heard them, were the most literal of facts and duties.

Is then the history of Christian society the history of a great evasion? We Christians of this day believe that in its earlier and later forms it is one; that the later has not forfeited the mind and the hopes of the earlier. Unless we are apostates without knowing it and meaning it, we accept the difference as being, in spite of enormous and manifest faults, the result of natural and intended changes. Are we mistaken? Are we insincere and double-minded, triflers with our belief, for allying Christianity with civilised society, for letting it take its chance, so to speak,

with the inevitable course and pursuits of human life, as it must be on a large scale and in the long run? It is the very meaning of an active and advancing state of civilisation that men should be busy with things of this present time: yet between the best side of Christian civilisation and the Sermon on the Mount there seems to be a great interval. Is Christian civilisation a true and fair growth? or is it, as it has been held to be, a deep degeneration, a great conspiracy to be blind? Are we Christians to our own shame as honest men, and to our Master's dishonour—'Christiani ad contumeliam Christi'? Has the Christian Church, in its practical solution of these questions, come near to the likeness of Balaam, who can neither be called a false prophet nor a true? Has Christian society fallen away from what it was meant to be; or may we think that, with all shortcomings and very great ones, it is fulfilling its end, and that its rule, with such astonishingly different applications, is still essentially the same?

The obvious answer is, and we hope the true

one, that God has appointed society, and that society means these consequences: that society, as well as religion, is God's creation and work. If we have anything to guide us as to God's will in the facts of the world,—if we see His providence in the tendencies and conditions amid which we live, and believe that in them He is our teacher and interpreter, we must believe that social order with its elementary laws, its necessary incidents and pursuits, is God's will for this present world. He meant us to live in this world. And for this world—unless there is nothing more to be done than to wait for its ending—what we call society, the rule of law, the employments of business, the cultivation of our infinite resources, the embodiment of public force and power, the increase of wealth, the continued improvement of social arrangements,—all this is indispensable. There is no standing still in these matters; the only other alternative is drifting back into confusion and violence. If the necessities of our condition, with all the light thrown on them by long experience, are

no evidence of God's purposes, we are indeed in darkness; if they are, it is plain that man, both the individual and the race, has a *career* here, that he has been furnished for it, I need not say how amply, and was meant to fulfil it. It is God's plan that in spite of the vanity and shortness of life, which is no Christian discovery (it was a matter for irony or despair long before Christianity), and in spite of that disproportionateness to eternity which the Gospel has disclosed to us, men should yet have to show what they are, and what is in them to do; should develope and cultivate their wonderful powers; should become something proportionate to their endowments for this life, and push to their full limit the employments which come to their hand. The Church by its practice, its greatest writers by their philosophy and theories, have sanctioned this view of the use and divine appointment of the present life. This natural order of things was once interrupted. It was when Christ came to begin society anew. But as soon as the first great

shock was over, which accompanied a Gospel of which the centre was the Cross and Resurrection, it became plain that the mission of the Church was not to remain outside of and apart from society, but to absorb it and act on it in endless ways; that Christianity was calculated and intended for even a wider purpose than had been prominently disclosed at first; that in more refined and extended ways than any one then imagined, it was to make natural human society, obstinate and refractory as it was, own its sway, and yield to an influence, working slowly but working inexhaustibly, over long tracts of time, not for generations, but centuries. Then was made clear the full meaning of such sayings as those of the net gathering of every kind, and the great house with many vessels. May it not be said that our Lord has done to human society—even that society which is for this world, and which in so many of its principles and influences is so deeply hostile to His spirit—what He did among men on earth? He came to widen

men's prospects of thought and hope to another world. And yet His great employment here was healing their bodies and comforting their present sufferings; comforting sorrows that must soon be again, healing sicknesses which were to come back worse, restoring to life bodies which were again to die. He is now above, 'giving gifts to men;' and now as then the great ends of His religion are the things of God and the soul. But as then He healed men's bodies when He sought their souls, so He has taken possession of that world which is to pass away; He has sanctified, He has in many ways transformed that society which is only for this time and life; and while calling and guiding souls one by one to the Father, He has made His gracious influence felt where it could least be expected. Even war and riches, even the Babel life of our great cities, even the high places of ambition and earthly honour, have been touched by His spirit, have found how to be Christian. Shadows as they are, compared with the ages that are before us, and

tainted with evil, we believe that they have felt the hand of the Great Healer, to whom power is given over all flesh; all power in heaven and on earth[1].

The tempter offered all the kingdoms of the world to Christ, and He refused them, and chose poverty instead. And yet they have become His, with all the glory of them, with all their incidents. Such has been the course which God's providence has appointed for that company, which looked at first as if it was intended to be but a scanty and isolated band of witnesses, living, like the Rechabites, in the wilderness till their true destiny was unfolded in the world to come,—among men but not of them. It was meant, if we see in history the will and the finger of God, to have *here* a higher flight and a higher action. Through the whole lump of civilised society the leaven was to spread and work. The great overshadowing tree, sheltering such different inhabitants, was to rise out of the mustard seed. Christendom has grown

[1] St. John xvii. 2; St. Matt. xxviii. 18.

out of the upper room. The Catholic Church was to be the correlative to the unity of all tribes of man. It was to expand and find room for all, with much margin for their differences, as they all were embraced by it, with all their fortunes and their hopes, with all that is essential and necessary in all human communion and society, with all that belongs to man's perfection and gives exercise to his great gifts here, with much, too, that belongs to his imperfection [m]. Was this an accident? Was

[m] If 'the world' with which Christians have to fight meant simply, as it seems sometimes in words taken to mean, 'society,' this is the same thing as admitting Christianity to be anti-social. There is no help for it, and we must say, 'Come out of it and be ye separate,' as, to a great extent, it had to be said of society in the first days. For society, as we term the world and its conditions, must make much of trade and industry, must have cares for the future, and make a virtue of prudence; must accumulate wealth, must go by law, must take care for liberty, must accept the necessities of war. But Christianity is not anti-social, if on certain occasions it has adopted a strong attitude about the ordinary pursuits and objects of men in civil society; about riches, or about life itself. This is no more than the soldier does, who is not anti-social, though there are times when all he does and thinks of is against the common ways of society.

this a great miscarriage? Have the purposes of God once more and in His final dispensation, been turned out of their path by the perversity and sin of man? Is all this acceptance of society by the Church, with all that society brings with it—its wars, its profession of arms, its worldly business, its passion for knowledge, its love of what is beautiful and great, its paramount rule of law—and not the mere acceptance only, but the Christian consecration of these things of the world,—is all this not as it should have been? It is manifest that in all this there is much that is unchristian, and that Christians have often tolerated what it was unpardonable to tolerate; but unless the whole Church has absolutely failed in vital principle and in understanding its mission and charge,—unless not only the Divine arrangements of the world in natural society, but the Divine interference to restore them have been defeated, and produced, as the poet says, 'not works but ruins[n],'—we must believe that what we have seen worked out with such

[n] 'Non arti ma ruine.'—Dante, Par. 8.

irresistible tendencies and uniform effects in the fusing of society with the Church, has been according to the original law and purpose of its existence. That is to say, the Church was not meant to be always in its first limitations and conditions. Christian society was meant to take in, as avowedly legitimate, other forms of life than those insisted on and recognised at first. It was *not* always to have all things common. It was *not* always to live by the literal rule, 'Take no thought for the morrow.' It was *not* always to set the least esteemed to judge, or to turn the other cheek. It was *not* always to decline the sword. It was *not* always to hold itself bound by the command, 'Sell all that thou hast.' Probably it is not too much to say that Christianity helped largely in that break-up of ancient society out of which modern society has grown. But society, broken up, was reorganised; and as, while time lasts, society must last, the common, inevitable laws of social action resumed their course when society entered on its new path with the Christian spirit working in it, some-

times more, sometimes less, ebbing or advancing, but manifestly in the long run influencing, improving, elevating it. Certainly, the history of Christendom has fallen far short of the ideal of the New Testament. Yet I do not think we can doubt that true Christian living has had at least as fair chance, in the shape which the Church has taken, as it could have had if the Church had always been like one of those religious bodies which shrink from society. It has had its corruptions: we may be quite sure that it would have had theirs, if it had been like them. In its types of goodness it has had what is impossible to them—greatness and variety. And its largeness and freedom have not been unfruitful. I am not thinking of exceptional lives of apostolic saintliness, like Bishop Ken's. But in all ages there have been rich men furnished with ability, busy men occupied in the deepest way with the things of this life, to whom Christ's words have been no unmeaning message,—students, lawyers, merchants, consumed with the desire of doing good; soldiers filled with the love of their neighbour;

'men,' as we call them, 'of the world' following all that is pure and just and noble in the fear and love of God; of whom if we cannot say that they are men in earnest to follow in the steps of Jesus Christ, it is difficult to know of whom we can say so.

Christianity, then, claims now to make occasions and instruments of serving God out of things which at first were relinquished as inconsistent with His service; and there is no doubt that at first the call to relinquish them was absolute and unqualified. The austere maxims of privation and separation from secular things which we find in the New Testament, have seemed at times to raise an impassable bar between its religion and society. If then, in their original severity, they were not to be universal, why are they there at all? But let us go back and see how it could have been otherwise. Consider who the Good Shepherd was who gave His life for the sheep; who Christ was, and what He came to do. Consider what Christianity was, and that what it had in view

was something which was to be *for ever*. Who that remembers that it was the Eternal Son of God who was here, and remembers what He was here for, can wonder at His putting aside all that we are so busy about as irrelevant and insignificant? Can we conceive Him speaking differently of the things of this life and what they are worth; or can we conceive His putting in a different shape His call to human beings to be like Him and to share His work? Who can be surprised at the way in which the New Testament seems to overlook and despise what is most important in this world, when we consider that its avowed object was to break down the barriers of our present nature and reveal an immortality before which all that now is shrinks into a transitory littleness of which nothing known to our experience can give the measure? Who can be surprised at what it seems to sacrifice, who thinks what the change was it professed to make in what concerns mankind, and all that *that* Sacrifice embraced by which the change was made? Indeed the tone and views of the New

Testament about the present life are very stern; but they are in harmony with that awful dispensation of things which is recorded in the Apostles' Creed: it is not too much to say that they are the only ones that could be in harmony with it. Measured against its disclosures and declared purpose, we can hardly conceive the demands of the New Testament other than what they are. Say that it claimed from the individual the absolute surrender of all interest in the ordinary objects of life: it did so for manifest ends, the highest the human mind can conceive, —only to be obtained at the highest cost, and for which the highest cost was little. But it did no more than society itself, in its degree, is forced to do for its greatest and most critical triumphs. This world was sacrificed—sacrificed for a great object: just as the soldier is called on to sacrifice it; just as great patriots, when they have to suffer in trying to improve human society, have themselves to sacrifice it. These maxims and precepts belong specially to the days when the Lord had just been here, the days of His miraculous inter-

position, the days when the Church was founded. There never can be such a time again. Those to whom the words were then said were to be the *salt*, the *light*, the *leaven*, in an eminence of meaning to which nothing later can approach. They were to surprise the world with something unheard of, both in claims, and in end, and in power. And we seem to me to undervalue the greatness of the time, the occasion, the necessities of the thing to be done, when we loosely take these sayings, softening and accommodating them, as meant in the same average sense for all periods, and fail to recognise their special bearing *then*. We are indeed commanded humility, self-denial, forbearance, an unworldly mind; they are always necessary. It is quite true to say that the texts we quote for them embody, as in instances, universal principles of duty in the most emphatic form, and raised to their highest power and strain: but the texts we quote for them *did* mean something more for those days than they do for ours.

What, then, are they to us? What are we to

think of that severe aspect of the New Testament which looks at us out of every page; its detachment from present things, its welcome for privation, its imperious demand for self-denial, its blessing on pain and sacrifice, which went so deep, not only into passionate souls of quick sensibility, like St. Francis of Assisi and the countless votaries of poverty, Catholic and heretic, of the middle ages, but into the large mind of Augustine and into the clear mind of Pascal? In our changed times, what is their place in our thoughts and consciences?

This meets us at the outset, and no change of times can alter it. These sayings come to us in the train of that eternal example of the Cross, of which they are but the faint shadow, and which to us is the key and centre of all religion. All that they say is but little to what is involved in *that*; and that is what is before the eyes of mankind henceforth. Turn their eyes where they will, wherever Christianity comes, it must bring *this* with it—Jesus Christ and Him crucified: and the Cross can mean but one thing.

Can we imagine the Cross standing alone? These sayings are not the abstract doctrines of philosophy; they reflect a real life and work the most astonishing ever heard of on earth. While the world lasts and Christ is believed in, come what changes may over society, what tells us of the Cross must oblige us to remember all that went with it, all that inevitably surrounded it, all that it drew after it. 'Jesus Christ,' we are told, and it must be so, 'is the same yesterday, and to-day, and for ever.'

Further, the stern words which in the midst of a high civilisation remind us of the foundations on which our religion were laid, give us the ultimate measure of all that we are engaged in here. We believe that society is meant by Him who made it to be always improving; and this can only be by ends being followed and powers developed, each in their own sphere with deep and earnest devotion, and for their own sake. The artist's mind must be full of his art, the merchant's of his trade. So only are things to be done, and objects which are great in their place

and order, to be attained. But when all this is allowed for, and the largest room is made for all human work and progress, we know the limits of our working here. We know our end; we know the conditions of our power and perfection; in the race, and in the highest specimens of it, the law of humiliating incompleteness is inexorable. Here then comes in the severity of the New Testament; not mocking us, not insulting us, not even merely telling us the plain certain truth about what we are; but while giving us indeed the measure of things here, giving us, too, that which compensates for their failure and completes their imperfection. For if Christianity is true, and not only there is another world, but we know it, and the way is opened to it by the Resurrection of Jesus Christ, it is plain that nothing can ever reverse or alter the proportion established in the New Testament between what is and what is to be. No progress here can ever qualify the words, 'Seek ye first the kingdom of God and His righteousness,' or make unreasonable St. Paul's view of life, 'the things that are seen

are temporal, the things that are not seen are eternal;' 'what things were gain to me those I counted loss for Christ.' 'Christiani nos sumus, propter futurum sæculum.' We hope that this world, as *we* know it and have a part in it, is something better, in spite of all its disorders, than the 'City of Destruction' of the great Puritan allegory; but after all, we can but be pilgrims and strangers on the road, and something else is our true country. Be this world what it may, the only true view of it is one which makes its greatness subordinate to that greater world in which it is to be swallowed up, and of which the New Testament is the perpetual witness.

Even when least consciously remembered, its maxims are in the background and tacitly influence our judgments, which would be very different if they were not there. But besides, they are the unalterable standard of the Christian spirit. As long as Christianity lasts, the heroic ideal must be the standard of all human life. Christianity can accept no other; whatever it may tolerate, its standard is irremovable. The

De Imitatione Christi can be written only in one way. The Christian spirit is a free spirit, and has, we believe, affinities with strangely opposite extremes. It can ally itself with riches as well as with poverty; with the life of the statesman and the soldier as well as of the priest; with the most energetic as well as with the most retired life; with vastness of thought, with richness of imagination, with the whole scale of feeling, as well as with the simplest character and the humblest obedience. It can bear the purple and fine linen; it can bear power; it can bear the strain and absorption of great undertakings. But there is one thing with which it will not combine. Its antagonist is selfishness. Be it where it may, it is the spirit which is ready in one way or another *to give itself* for worthy and noble reasons. As long as the New Testament is believed in, we must believe that the Christian spirit is that which seeks not its own, which is not careful to speak its own words, or find its own pleasure, or do its own ways. It is not merely the spirit of self-denial and sacrifice; it is the sprit of

self-denial and sacrifice for the great objects put before it. For the great and rare thing is when purpose and self-denial answer to one another, and one by its greatness justifies the other, and animates it. Doubtless it is hard to have self-denial: but it is harder still to have a great object which shall make self-denial itself fall into a subordinate place, indispensable there, but not thought much of for its own sake. The heroic mind and the Christian mind is shown not simply in the loss of all things, in giving up this world, in accepting pain and want, but in doing this, if it must be done, for that for which it is worth a man's while to do it; for something of corresponding greatness, though unseen; for truth, for faith, for duty, for the good of others, for a higher life. And this view the words of the New Testament keep continually before us. There is plenty of temptation to give up the heroic standard. It often fails. It is easily counterfeited. Its failure is scandalous. And not only our self-indulgence, but our suspicion and hatred of insincere pretence, our moderation and common

sense, bid us content ourselves with something short of it, and take our aim by what we call our nature. But the New Testament will not meet us here. The heroic standard is the only one it will countenance for its own, as proportionate to the greatness of its disclosures. It is a standard which lends itself to very various conditions. It may be owned in society or out of it; in solitude or in the press of affairs; in secret wrestlings or in open conduct; by the poor and ignorant or the great and wise. But everywhere it makes the same call. Everywhere it implies really great thoughts, great hopes, great attempts; great measures of what is worthy of man, and great willingness to pay their price.

The Sermon on the Mount continually reminds us all that we are disciples of a religion which was indeed founded in a law of liberty, but began also in poverty and the deepest renunciation of self. We need the lesson. We believe, surely not wrongly, that God meant this world to be cultivated and perfected to the utmost point to which man's energy and intelligence can go. We

trust that the Christian spirit can live and flourish in society as we know it, different as it is from the first days. But it is clear that, as society goes on accumulating powers and gifts, the one hope of society is in men's modest and unselfish use of them; in simplicity and nobleness of spirit increasing, as things impossible to our fathers become easy and familiar to us; in men caring for better things than money, and ease, and honour; in being able to see the riches of the world increase and not set our hearts upon them; in being able to admire and forego. And we need such teaching as the Sermon on the Mount to preach to us the unalterable subordination of things present to things to come, to remind us of our object and our standard. This it is to all of us. But it was in its own time more than this. It was the call to the great revival of the world. And is it not true that in proportion as that impulse from time to time re-awakens sympathy, the meaning of that call comes home with more vivid light and force? I am sure that there are numbers who follow the work of this life in

simplicity of heart and purity of intention. But there is besides a more direct and conscious service of the kingdom of heaven. There are those whose hearts God has touched, who feel that they are not merely men blessed by all that the Gospel has done for them, but that they have a special business and duty as servants of that Gospel. They feel the necessity of something deeper than this world's blessings, of greater aims than this world's business. They feel that there are evils which it needs something stronger than even civilisation to cure, sufferings which ask for more than an average self-devotion to comfort, wants which nothing but a full compliance with the New Testament standard can meet. The words of the New Testament, which seem so austere to us common men, are intelligible and natural to them. These words are the secret voice and sign of Christ to those elect spirits for whom He has higher work than the highest works of this world.

What, after all, are these words but the expression of the universal law, that for great effects and great works a proportionate self-dedication is

necessary—the single eye, the disengaged heart, the direct purpose, the concentrated will, the soul on fire, the mind set on the invisible and the future, in love with things great and pure and high. And we shall only think that the time is over for such a call, if we are satisfied with what has been and what is. But it is the peculiarity of the religion of the Bible that, whatever may be the aspect of the past and the present, in spite of all glories of what we look back to, and all discouragements in what we see now, it ever claims the future for its own. If we have the spirit of our religion, it is on the future that we must throw ourselves in hope and purpose. But if we dare to hope in the future for a greater triumph for Christianity than the world has ever seen (and why should we not if we believe our own creed?) we shall come to see that the language of the New Testament has not yet lost its meaning. For the world is not to be won by anything—by religion, or empire, or thought—except on those conditions with which the kingdom of heaven first came. What conquers must

have those who devote themselves to it; who prefer it to all other things; who are proud to suffer for it; who can bear anything so that it goes forward. All is gladly given for the pearl of great price. Life is at once easier in its burdens and cheaper in its value with the great end in view. Such devotion to an object and cause is no unfamiliar sight in the world which we know. We must not think it is confined to Christians. We must not think that Christians only are enamoured with simplicity of life, with absolute renunciation of wealth and honour for the sake of a high purpose; that they only can persevere, unnoticed and unthanked, in hard, weary work. The Great Master, who first made men in earnest about these things, has taught some who seem not to follow Him. But if Christians are to hold their place and do His work, they must not fall behind. They have an example and ideal of love and sacrifice, to which it is simply unmeaning to make anything of this world a parallel. Their horizon is wider than anything here can be. They have a strength and

help which it is overwhelming to think of and believe. And theirs is the inheritance of those words and counsels by which at first the world was overcome. If great things are ever to be done again among us, it must be by men who, not resting satisfied with the wonderful progress of Christian society, yet not denying it, not undervaluing it, much less attempting to thwart it, still feel that there is something far beyond what it has reached to, for our aims and hopes even here. It must be by men who feel that the severe and awful words of the New Testament, from which we sometimes shrink, contain, not in the letter it may be, but in the spirit, not in a mere outward conformity to them, but in a harmony of the will, not as formal rules of life, but as laws of character and choice,—the key to all triumphs that are to be had in the time to come. Those who shall catch their meaning most wisely and most deeply, and who are not afraid of what it involves, will be the masters of the future, will guide the religion of serious men among those who follow us.

May our Lord give us grace to open our eyes to the full greatness of His inestimable benefit, and, each of us according to his own place and order and day, daily to endeavour ourselves to follow the blessed steps of His most holy life.

SERMON III.

CHRIST'S EXAMPLE.

1 COR. xi. 1.

Be ye followers of me, even as I also am of Christ.

ONCE in the course of the world's history we believe that there has been seen on earth a perfect life. It was a life not merely to admire, but to follow. It has been ever since, for the period of man's existence of which we know most, and during which the race has made the greatest progress, the acknowledged human standard; the example, unapproachable yet owned to be universally binding, and ever to be attempted, for those who would fulfil the law of their nature.

And we have the spirit and principles of that perfect life made applicable to men in our Lord's numerous words about human character, beha-

viour, and views of life. We have not only the perfect example; but we have it declared, in words of equal authority, *why* and *how* it is perfect. Lessons, teaching and enforcing, accompany each incident of our Lord's ministry; they are drawn together into a solemn summary in the Sermon on the Mount. Here we have the highest moral guidance for the world. It is impossible to conceive any life more divine than that thus shown us. All the more amazing is the contrast, when once we master it in our minds, between what is shown us and the form in which it is clothed. That inimitable acting out of perfect goodness speaks in homely, and, at first hearing, commonplace words, without any apparent consciousness of its own greatness, as if it belonged to the rudest life of the people, and were something within everybody's reach. It takes no account of what we pride ourselves upon, as the finer parts of our nature, our powers of thought, our imagination, our discrimination of beauty. In illustration and phrase and argument, it uses nothing but what is of a piece with

the first necessities of life, with the speech and cares, the associations and employments of the humblest. That appeal of the Supreme Goodness for man's allegiance and love was to what was primary and common and elementary in his nature. It was far too real to be anything else.

For that example and law of life were nothing less than *universal*. They were meant for all men. Yet, when we say *universal*, how are we at once reminded of the vast and infinite differences among those for whom there is this one Pattern. For what profound and broad contrasts divide men from men; what gulfs separate one race from another, earlier from later ages, any one state of thought and social progress from what went before it and follows it: and, within narrower limits, what endless variety, baffling all imagination to follow, of circumstances and fortune, of capacity and character, of wealth or poverty, of strength or weakness, of inclinations and employments, of a kindly or an unkindly lot. Yet for all, *one* life is the guiding light, and the words which express it speak to all. A life, the

highest conceivable, on almost the lowest conceivable stage, and recorded in the simplest form, with indifference to all outward accompaniments attractive whether to the few or to the many, is set before us as the final and unalterable ideal of human nature, amid all its continual and astonishing changes. Differing so widely as men do, Christ calls them all alike to follow Him: unspeakably great as His example is, it is for the many and the average as much as for the few; homely as is its expression, there is no other lesson for the deepest and most refined. The least were called to its high goodness: the greatest had nothing offered them but its brief-spoken plainness.

This combination, in the most practical and thoroughly in earnest of all rules of living, that its pattern is nothing less than the *highest*, and also nothing less than *universal*, is one of the proofs of the divine character of the Gospel. But no doubt questions suggest themselves in connection with it, though the honest and true heart will never find them in its way. For it

may be asked, and *is* asked, how such an example can seriously be meant to claim the efforts of those who make up the great majority, the middle class in the moral scale, ordinary in character, ordinary in their views of life? It is not difficult to understand how it was the rule of saints; but how was it to be that of all the world? How can it fit in with the infinite differences of tastes, and powers, and work? How can it follow the changes of living human society? So again, how is it to be a model at once to the poor and to the rich? How is the life of the Great Sufferer and Sacrifice to be the rule for those, who though they are serious, religious people, self-disciplined and earnest in doing good, yet cannot be denied to live in comfort and enjoy life? How does the morality of the Sermon on the Mount fit in with and apply to the actual and accepted realities of our modern social state? It seems the natural rule for what used to be called by way of distinction the 'religious life;' yet is it not also the rule for the soldier, the trader, the philosopher, for

the life of men of the world? and is not that an example not merely for clergymen but for laymen?

How is it, equally and really, to be the measure for one and the other?

Christianity makes itself universal by making its moral standard, not verbal rules, but a *character*. It has often been said that Christian morality is a system of principles, not of laws; that its definite rules are most scanty, that its philosophy of life is of the simplest and most inartificial. This is so. In it a law has been exchanged for a character. It professes to aim at doing without laws, and substituting for them the study of a living Person, and the following of a living mind. 'The law is not for a righteous man.' 'Be ye perfect, as your Father in heaven is perfect.' More definitely, more plainly within our comprehension, that character is one who is called in Scripture, in an incommunicable sense, the Image of God. In the face of Jesus Christ the glory and the goodness of God shone with a new light to the consciences and reason of men. All that He did and said, the Sermon on

the Mount, the Lord's Prayer, His sentences on men and things and thoughts that came before Him, formed one whole, were the various expressions of one mind and character, which was the reflection of the perfect goodness of the Father. And that character is the Christian law.

And this is what fits the Christian standard to be a universal one. Indeed, it is not easy to see how an example and rule for the world can be, except in the form of a character. For a character, if it is great enough, carries its force far beyond the conditions under which it may have been first disclosed. If shown under one set of circumstances, its lesson can be extended to another, perfectly different: a character is to rules, as the living facts of nature are to the words by which we represent them. It will bear being drawn upon for the application of its truth to new emergencies; it adapts itself with the freedom and elasticity of life, which is very different from the accommodations of theories, to the changes which meet it. When

by thought and sympathy we have entered into it, we feel that there are still depths beyond, that we have not exhausted what it has to suggest or teach. We can follow it on, from the known, to what it would be, in the new and strange. It unfolds itself in fact; and we can conceive its doing so in idea, as things round it alter. It is not tied to the limitations and exigencies of its first development: change them, and its action changes too. We see that Character, in which we know that we behold perfect goodness, and which has in fact drawn up the soul of man to heights unknown before,—we see it, as we see all things here, only *in part*. We see it only in a special dispensation or economy; acting, speaking, judging, choosing, only in reference to one particular set of conditions, according to what the occasion and end called for. It is the supreme and essential goodness: but we see it unfolding itself under the conditions of the supreme humiliation, meeting the demands on it of what the humiliation involved. Ἐκένωσεν ἑαυτόν. He 'emptied himself' indeed. What

was the greatest of the miracles He vouchsafed to us, to that Almighty and Infinite Power which in His proper Nature He was? What were the most overwhelming instances of His love and wisdom which we see, compared with that inexhaustible wellspring of goodness and truth from which they flowed forth? We witnessed that absolute goodness, as He spoke and acted in the state which He had chosen for our redemption and restoration; as was called for and was fit, under the circumstances in which our Maker descended to be one of us. But we know that that perfect goodness does not show itself only under such conditions; it shows itself equally in Christ creating, in Christ reigning, in Christ judging: and when we raise our thoughts to what He is *there*, we know that His goodness must wear an aspect, which, though essentially the same, would look very different to us. 'Jesus Christ is the same yesterday and to-day and for ever'—the same in glory as in the form of a servant. But there are *other* ways in which His goodness shows itself to those who worship Him on the throne of

nature, besides those in which they saw it who beheld Him preparing for the Cross. To us on earth it is revealed in sorrow and sympathy; but we know that it must be exhibited too in the heaven of the divine bliss. The veil has fallen from Him; that temporary partial state of circumstances under which His goodness was shown on earth in that narrow space of time that He was with us, has passed away. And the same goodness moves in different lines, comes with different claims and judgments, now that, no longer despised and rejected, He has taken His own place, and has all things for His own.

Still, under conditions utterly changed, His goodness is that same very goodness which we saw. And so we can derive from that Character lessons for our state, which is so different from His; and for our imperfection make His perfection the law. And not only so, but we can derive lessons from it for conditions of human life very far removed from those conditions under which His goodness was manifested to us here. The interval is indeed great between those conditions

and circumstances, and the state of things amid which we believe that He has called us to run our course. We, instead of being the company of poor men, separate from the world, whom He gathered round Him, and of whom He was one, belong to a varied society of the most complicated order. Functions, gifts, vocations, differ endlessly: we include the extremes of outward fortune, of place and office and personal cultivation. But under all these different conditions, there is, if we know how to find it, the way in which that perfect goodness would teach us how to feel and how to behave. Literal imitation may be impossible, but it is not impossible to catch its spirit and apply its lessons to altered circumstances. It is true, we have only as it were part of the curve actually traced for us; but the fragment is enough to show him who can learn its real law what, in spaces far removed, is the true line and direction of its prolongation. And so the conformity to the character of Jesus Christ extends, not only to a life like His in its lot and duties, but to one

which on earth is called to tasks outwardly as different as can be conceived. In that character, though shown to us in the form of servant, we know that everything is gathered which could make human nature what it ought to be. That perfect goodness was *potentially* all that the sons of men can ever be called to be by the course of that Providence which appoints their lot and the order of their life. His example enfolds them all. It will bear being appealed to for guidance under whatever different circumstances they are called to live: they may learn from it, if we may venture so to speak, how He would have acted in their place, and how He would have His followers to act.

1. Consider, for instance, what was the first and prominent feature of that perfect life as we saw it: it was, I suppose, the combination in it, most intimate and never interrupted, of the work of time and human life with that which is beyond sight and time. It is vain to try to express in words that of which nothing but the Gospels open before us can adequately convey the extent—

the impression left on our minds of One who, all the while that He was on earth, was in heart and soul and thought undivided for a moment from heaven. He does what is most human; but He lives absolutely in the Divine. However we see Him—tempted, teaching, healing, comforting hopeless sorrow, sitting at meat at the wedding or the feast, rebuking the hypocrites, in the wilderness, in the temple, in the passover chamber, on the Cross,—He of whom we are reading is yet all the while that which His own words can alone express, 'even the Son of Man which is in heaven.' The Divine presence, the union with the Father, is about Him always, like the light and air, ambient, invisible, yet incapable, even in thought, of being away. And yet, with this perpetual dwelling and conversing with God, to which it were blasphemy to compare the highest ascents of the saintliest spirit, what we actually see is the rude hard work and the sufferings by which He set up among men the kingdom of God. What the most devout contemplation, detached from all earthly things,

could never attain to, was in Him compatible with the details and calls of the busiest ministry: yet labour and care, and the ever-thronging society of men, came not for an instant between Him and the Father; and even we, with our dim perception of that Divine mystery, cannot think of Him without that background of heaven, not seen, but felt in all that He says or does.

Men have compared the active and the contemplative life. And they have compared also the life of practical beneficence with the life of devotion, of religious interest and spiritual discipline. We see great things done without the sense of religion, perhaps with the feeling towards it of distrust and aversion. We see the religious spirit sometimes unable to cope with the real work of life, failing in fruit and practical direction, failing to command the respect of those who have other ways of ministering to men's wants. But in Him, who is our great Ideal, we have both lives combined. No recluse conveys so absolutely the idea of abstraction from the world as our Lord in the thick of His activity.

Than that heavenly-mindedness, it is impossible to conceive anything more pure and undisturbed. Than that life of unwearied service, it is impossible to conceive anything more absolute in self-sacrifice. Our Lord was the great example of man working for his fellows; of a consuming desire to raise and bless mankind. 'The zeal of thine house,' as He says, in the loftiest sense of the words, 'hath devoured me.' But He was also, at the same time and in equal measure, the proof to the end of time, that the highest degree of the divine life is not opposed to, but in natural alliance with, the highest and noblest service of man. The world had seen instances of human goodness cut off, except in the most indirect and precarious way, from that conscious communion with God which is religion. It was incomplete and maimed. Morally, as well as theologically, without faith man cannot, even as man, be perfect. But when He came, who was to show mankind a perfect life, there was the great gap filled up; there was goodness, the goodness of human nature, with the part restored

which had been wanting—its link with the Divine; its consciousness of its relation to the Father and capacity for communion with Him. In Jesus Christ, we see man serving to the utmost his brethren; but we also see man one with the thought and will of God.

Here we see how character in itself, irrespective of circumstance, is adapted to be a guide; here is an example, shown under the most exceptional conditions, yet fit to be universal. Of such a life what truer key than the words, 'Seek ye first the kingdom of God and His righteousness'? what more expressive account than the words, 'Ye cannot serve two masters; ye cannot serve God and mammon'? But on what outward circumstances does such a life depend? Why is it not equally to be realised in the calling of the ruler, the rich man, the student? How need their outward conditions affect their relationship to God, their sense of it, their grasp by faith of what *He* is and what *they* are, and what He has called them to—the unfolding in their hearts of reverence and devotion and

love; their sense of what their work is for, and what makes its value? He whom they worship came in the deepest poverty, separate from the world and its order; and they are at the opposite social extreme, perhaps born to rule, commanding wealth, endowed with great faculties. The mind of man cannot, indeed, help being, as it ought to be, touched with the contrast. But His example is as full of meaning to them as it would be if they, like Him, had been born in poverty. Why should not that combination of union with God and the utmost activity of all powers of soul and body go before *them*, as their guiding light and encouragement, as well as before the priest or the sister of charity? How is it less adapted to be the animating and governing pattern to those in whose hands are the greatest interests of mankind, and their course and fate for times to come? Was not Jesus Christ, though we saw Him but for a short time in abasement and poverty, in reality the Lord of all things, and the Prince of the kings of the earth?

2. As His life was the pattern for the life of *faith*, so it was the great instance of the life of *truth*. For to all, quite apart from the accidental conditions of their state, it shows what alone is real and great in life. The imitation of Jesus Christ, even in the highest form in which we can conceive it, must always be but by way of proportion. When we are called to be like Him, it is obvious that the impassable distance between *His* ends and works and ours, limits the command. To imitate Christ, being what He was; to imitate Him who joined in Himself what He alone ever joined; to imitate Him whose life and work were absolutely by themselves, both in that part which we can see, and in that larger part impossible to be known by man, of that mystery which oppressed and baffled the illuminated intellect of St. Paul,—this, even in idea, eludes the utmost stretch of imagination. We cannot follow His steps, who for our sakes became poor that we through His poverty might be rich; who died for us, that we might live. Like Him, in what makes Him the hope of the

world, we cannot be: and any attempted outward conformity of circumstances, or lot, or discipline, has in it the danger attending every attempt at what is in the nature of things impossible—the delusion, of which the extreme instance is the state of thought represented in the story of the stigmata of St. Francis.

And yet it is true that in every page of the New Testament we are called to be like Him; to be renewed into His image; to put on Christ. An apostle is not afraid to express this conformity by that very image which we shrink from in the hard literal form of the middle age legend[a]. And how can we be like the Infinite Being who made and saved and shall judge mankind, except so far as in our work and life—whatever it be matters but little—we bear a mind and spirit proportionate, as He did, to our calling and our end. For surely there are ends and purposes in the life of each of us, which are literally as real as the ends of His life. One is high and another low; one has much and

[a] 2 Cor. iv. 10.

another little; one is born to govern, to acquire, to call forth new powers in the world of man or nature; another to pass his days unknown, to carry on the detail of necessary labour in his time, to make no mark and leave no memorial. But to every one who believes in God and providence, the work of each is equally real: a call, a commission, a talent, a stewardship from God; and who is too high or too low to say that the inexpressible seriousness and earnestness of the life described in the New Testament is not suited to guide him how to think and feel about his own life?

For what we see in that life is not only a purpose and work passing man's understanding, but that purpose followed and that work done, in a way which man *can* understand. It is a life governed by its end and purpose, in which shows or illusions have no place, founded on unshrinking, unexaggerated truth, facing everything as it is without disguise or mistake; and further, a life in which its purpose is followed with absolute indifference to whatever sacrifice

it may cost. The Gospels show us One, with the greatest of works to do, a work so great, that it sounds unbecoming to qualify it with our ordinary words for greatness—One, never diverted from His work, never losing its clue, never impatient, never out of heart, who cries not, nor strives, nor makes haste; One, whose eye falls with sure truth and clear decision on everything in the many-coloured scene of life; One, around whom, as He passes through the world, all things that stir man's desire and ambition take their real shape and relative place and final value; One, to whom nothing of what we call loss or gain is so much as worth taking account of, in competition with that for which He lived. He has put all this into words which mark for ever the change He made in our views of life—'My meat is to do the will of Him that sent Me, and to finish His work;' 'I must work the works of Him that sent Me while it is day;' and when all was over, 'I have finished the work that Thou gavest Me to do.' Such a life He generalises in such words as, 'what shall a

man give in exchange for his soul,' in His sayings about the treasure in heaven, the single eye, the pearl of great price, the violent taking the kingdom of heaven by force.

Unless it is all one at last to be a trifler or in earnest, and unless a high standard of life involves no more cost or foregoing of what we like than a low one, that life is the one which all conditions want, and all may use as their guide. For the great vice of human nature is slackness about what is good; not insensibility, not want of admiration, not want of leanings and sympathies, but feebleness and uncertainty of will; *that* in moral character, which would be represented in intellectual work by looseness and laziness, disinclination to close with things, being content with what is superficial and inexact. Every work and calling of life has a high side and a low one. In one extreme difference as in another, down to the smallest and humblest sphere, the trial of duty and high purpose is equally real, and it is equally costly. Bring the Sermon on the Mount into a life of

activity or of riches, that is of power: is it simply, as it may seem at first, a discord? or may not the two, though so far apart, be made to answer truly to one another, as the differing parts of a harmony? What it does is to impose upon riches, or business, or learning, or art, the severe and high view of life, instead of the low and self-indulgent one. What it does is to hold up, in its inexorable claims, the highest end, and to preach the truth that the greatest liberty is the greatest trust. Far beyond the limitations of outward circumstances it speaks of an inward foundation of character, of simplicity, thoroughness, completeness of the man himself, answering to the facts amid which he lives and their extreme seriousness: which, like the house on the rock, can endure its appointed trials, and can take care of itself wherever it has to serve God, in high place or low. The estimate in it of the value of outward things, its warnings against their temptations—what are they but the counterpart, in infinitely more solemn tones, of the voice of all experi-

ence? The Master of truth and reality, who passed by these outward things as valueless to Himself, surely knew what was in man when He spoke so earnestly of their immense and fatal abuse. The difficulties, so great and so affecting, which they create in the way of better things, wring from Him, as it were, cries and bursts of pain—'Many are called but few are chosen;' 'Strait is the gate and narrow the way;' 'How hardly shall they that have riches enter into the kingdom of God.' They dictate those preferences for the hard lot and the bitter side of life, for mourning, for poverty, for persecution, the blessing on those of whom men speak ill. Can we say that the world did not want those plain truths and those sharp words? But the sacrifices and self-denials of the Sermon on the Mount are not dependent on outward conditions. They simply represent the price which *must* be paid, in some shape or another, for all true and pure living. The alternative of loss, of pain, of being ill thought of, meets from time to time every one, wherever he is placed, who

aims at anything above the dead level of custom, much more at such a standard as the Christian. And those higher ends of life may be the object of deep and fervent effort, where the eye of the looker-on rests upon what seems too busy, too exalted, or too humble to be the scene of the greatest of earthly endeavours, the inward discipline of the soul. Surely it may be there, where nothing is the token of its presence; it may be there, with its bitter surrenders of will, its keen self-control, its brave and deliberate welcomings of pain, masked behind the turmoil of public life or the busy silence of study; it may be there, stern and high in its choice, stern in its view of the world, stern in its judgment of itself, stern in its humility, yet nothing be seen but the performance of the common round of duty, nothing be shown but the playfulness which seems to sport with life.

'Se sub serenis vultibus
Austera virtus occulit,
Timens videri, ne suum,
Dum prodit, amittat decus[b].'

[b] Motto to Froude's Remains.

3. The life of *faith* means the life which comes nearest to His in never forgetting the unseen Father in the activities of the present. The life of *truth* and purified will means the life which comes nearest to His in holding fast, amid the infinite and intrusive shadows which crowd the path of life, the severe realities of our appointed lot, the unspeakable realities of our further destiny. But this is not all that that character invites us to copy. There were those who had walked with God before He came, though none ever walked with God as He did. And many had spoken wonderfully the truths concerning our state, and even concerning our hopes; they had sounded great depths in the sea of wisdom; they had drawn the line between what is solid and what is vain in life; they had caught firmly and clearly what was worth living for; they had measured truly the relative value of the flesh and the spirit. But none but He had so combined with the sternest reason the deepest love. This was what made Him new and without parallel in the world.

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It was that, in Him, truth, duty, religion, ended in love—love inexhaustible, all-pervading, infinitely varied. With Him, reason did not, as it so often does with the clearest and ablest of the sons of man, stop in itself; it passed over into the sphere of the affections, and kindled into the manifold forms in which the play of the living heart shews itself. Reason with Him—severe inexorable reason—was translated into the diversified and elastic activity of doing good; compassionating, making allowances, condescending, consoling; healing the sick, casting out devils; forgiving sins and cleansing them; 'preaching the gospel to the poor, binding up the broken hearted, preaching deliverance to the captives and recovery of sight to the blind, setting at liberty them that are bruised;' calling the weary and heavy laden to rest—to make proof of His 'meekness and lowliness,' and take His yoke upon them: laying down His life for the world.

It is this new commandment, new to the world, but as old as the eternal Word who brought it, which turns the Sermon on the

Mount from a code of precepts into the expressions and instances of a character. Its words do not stand by themselves; they are not as the definite commandments of a law; they cannot be represented or exhausted by any rules; they have their interpretation and their reason in that divine temper which had come with Jesus Christ to restore the world. The purity, the humility, the yielding and forgiving mind, the ungrudging and unflagging goodness they speak of, were but some among the infinitely varied ways of acting out the meaning of His last charge—'That ye love one another as I have loved you[c];' and of His last prayer—'That the love wherewith Thou hast loved Me, may be in them, and I in them[d].' His life, and the character revealed in it, is the interpreter of what He means by love. A great deal may be said of love without ever really touching what is its vital essence. But here our sympathies are appealed to. We see how Jesus Christ showed what it is to lead a life of love. He showed

[c] St. John xv. 12. [d] Ib. xvii. 26.

how it could be carried out to the uttermost in what we call an extreme case of our human condition. But, as it has been said, 'glorious in His darknesses[e],' He showed that mind and spirit which He had brought into the world for mankind at large; for all conditions in which man is placed; which is not tied to the circumstances in which it was first disclosed; which was something too real, too free, too universal to be restricted to any outward state; which was to inspire and govern character in all forms of the social order; fit to be the ruling principle in him who commands the results and powers of the last stage of civilisation, as in him whom nothing raises above barbarism but his Christian love, or in him who parts with society for the present, to sow seeds from which society shall be the better in the future.

The mutable shapes of society, unfolded by God's providence, fix almost without our will our outward circumstances. But for the soul, wherever it is, Christ our Lord has one un-

[e] Taylor, Life of Christ, vol. ii. p. 59; Heber's ed.

changing call, 'Be perfect'; and He has one unchanging rule for its fulfilment, 'Be what I am, feel what I felt, do as I should do.' How shall we? How but by looking steadfastly at Him and trying to see and know Him? Yet we have to remember that that Divine Character is what it is, apart from our ways of looking at it; and that our ways of looking at it and understanding it depend on our own characters. We behold Him through the medium of our own minds and hearts. It holds true, in the things of the spirit as in those of the imaginative intellect, that 'we receive according to what we give': the light, the landscape, the features are the same, but the eye, the capacity, the knowledge, the feeling differ. It is but saying that He is shown to us under the conditions of all human things, to say that we do not all see Him in the same way. But, however we may mistake, that Divine manifestation still remains the same, to teach other and wiser men, and ourselves if we become wiser; and however true our view may be, there is still, beyond what we see

and grasp, more to be known and loved and copied. We see this in the history of the Church. We talk indeed with admiration of His being the one standard to the endlessly differing conditions of society, to rich and poor, wise and ignorant, strong and weak, the few and the many; but what is this to the wonder of His having been the constant standard to distant and different ages? In the same Living Person each age has seen its best idea embodied; but its idea was not adequate to the truth—there was something still beyond. An age of intellectual confusion saw in the portraiture of Him in the Gospels the ideal of the great teacher and prophet of human kind, the healer of human error, in whom were brought together and harmonised the fractured and divergent truths scattered throughout all times and among all races. It judged rightly; but that was only part. The monastic spirit saw in it the warrant and suggestion of a life of self-devoted poverty as the condition of perfection: who can doubt that there was much to justify it; who can doubt

that the reality was something far wider than the purest type of monastic life? The Reformation saw in Him the great improver, the breaker of the bonds of servitude and custom, the quickener of the dead letter, the stern rebuker of a religion which had forgotten its spirit: and doubtless He was all this, only He was infinitely more. And now in modern times there is the disposition to dwell on Him as the ideal exemplar of perfect manhood, great in truth, great in the power of goodness, great in His justice and His forbearance, great in using and yet being above the world, great in infinite love, the opener of men's hearts to one another, the wellspring, never to be dry, of a new humanity. He is all this, and this is infinitely precious. We may 'glorify Him for it, and exalt Him as much as we can; but even yet will He far exceed[f].' That one and the same Form has borne the eager scrutiny of each anxious and imperfect age; and each age has recognised with boundless sympathy and devotion what it

[f] Ecclus. xliii. 30.

missed in the world; and has found in Him what is wanted. Each age has caught in those august lineaments what most touched and swayed its heart. And as generations go on and unfold themselves, they still find that Character answering to their best thoughts and hopes; they still find in it what their predecessors had not seen or cared for; they bow down to it as their inimitable pattern, and draw comfort from a model who was plain enough and universal enough to be the Master, as of rich and poor, so of the first century and the last. It has been the root of all that was great and good in our fathers. We look forward with hope to its making our children greater and better still. 'Regnum tuum regnum omnium saeculorum; et dominatio tua in omni generatione et generatione[g].'

What is the lesson? Surely this: to remember when we talk of the example of Christ, that the interpretations and readings of it are all short of the thing itself; and that we possess, to see and to learn from, the thing itself. We should

[g] Ps. cxliv. 13.

be foolish and wrong to think ourselves above learning from all that wise and holy men have seen in it. But the thing itself, the Divine Reality, is apart from, and is ever greater than, what the greatest have thought of it and said of it. *There* it is in itself, in its authentic record, for us to contemplate and search into, and appropriate, and adore. Let us not be satisfied with seeing it through the eyes of others. Mindful in what spirit we look at it—remembering what, after all, have not ceased to be the unalterable conditions of knowing truth,—purity, humility, honesty,—let us seek to know Him directly more and more, as He is in the New Testament; as those saw Him, whose souls took the immediate impression of His presence and His Spirit. So does the Apostle describe the progress of the great transformation, by which men grow to be like their Lord and their God. 'But we all, with open face, beholding as in a glass the glory of the Lord, are changed into the same image, from glory to glory, even as by the Spirit of the Lord.'

SERMON IV.

CIVILISATION AND RELIGION.

ST. MATT. v. 13, 14, 16.

Ye are the salt of the earth: but if the salt have lost his savour, wherewith shall it be salted? it is thenceforth good for nothing, but to be cast out, and to be trodden under foot of men. Ye are the light of the world. A city that is set on an hill cannot be hid. . . . Let your light so shine before men, that they may see your good works, and glorify your Father which is in heaven.

ONE of the purposes for which our Lord instituted the Christian Church was that it might exercise a distinct moral influence on the society round it. Separate in idea from the world, and at first separate from it in a great measure in fact, it was to be *in* the world, to touch the world, and to make great changes in it; to attract and win and renew. It was to be a principle of health and freshness, the antagonist

of corruption and decay. And it was to work, not at a distance, but by contact, by subtle and insensible forces, which combined with what they acted on and modified. 'The kingdom of heaven was to be like unto leaven, which a woman took and hid in three measures of meal, till the whole was leavened.' In that great discourse with which the Gospel teaching opens, the first thing is the character of the children of the kingdom, the second their relation to the world around them. After the beatitudes, comes, thus early, long before the disciples were an organised body, or were yet fitted for the greatness of what they were to be, the picture of their office to society, in its two powers of purification and light, and with its attendant responsibility, answering to its greatness. For it was in no partial or temporary sphere that they were to affect mankind. 'Ye are the salt of the earth,' says their Master. And then, investing them with one of the most transcendent of His own titles, before He had yet claimed it Himself,—'Ye are the light of the world.'

It is simply a fact of history that Christianity and the Christian Church have exerted on human society a moral influence which justifies the figures by which it was described—an influence more profound, more extensive, more enduring, and more eventful, than any that the world has seen.

But there has always been a tendency in society in its higher forms, to produce apparently by its own forces, some degree, at least, of that moral improvement and rise which the religious principle has produced. It is this rise and growth of moral standard and effort, this aim and attempt at higher things in life, and not merely in the instruments and appliances of life, which enters as the essential element into the true notion of civilisation, and alone deserves the name. Civilisation cannot be said to be the same thing as the influence of Christianity, or to be purely a result derived from it; for these tendencies to moral improvement existed before Christianity, and shewed themselves by unequivocal signs, however much they were thwarted, neutralised, or at last destroyed. There are

certain great virtues which social life loudly calls for, and tends to foster; which as thought grows and purposes widen, are felt more clearly to be the true and imperative conditions of all human action. Civilisation, whether or not it presupposes and assists in keeping in view another life, arranges primarily and directly for this one; and these virtues it produces in increasing force and perfection, as its fruit and test. It is no disparagement to that which we believe to be as infinitely greater than civilisation as the future destiny of man is greater than his present state, to acknowledge gladly that these beneficial tendencies were originally implanted in society by the Author of society. But the effect has been, that alongside of the influence of Christianity has grown up another influence, not independent of it, yet not identical with it; owing much—it would be bold to limit *how* much—to Christianity, yet having roots of its own; not in its own nature hostile to religion, yet moving on a separate line; sometimes wearing the guise of a rival, sometimes of a suspicious and un-

congenial associate, with diverging aims and incommensurate views; but always, even when most friendly, with principles and methods of its own. It has many names, and perhaps none of them happy ones; but it is that power, distinct from religion, however much it may be affected by it, which shapes our polity, and makes our laws, and rules in our tribunals, and sets the standard in literature, and impregnates our whole social atmosphere. In our days, we seem to witness a great triumph of this influence. Many of the characteristic phenomena of our time seem to point to great and salutary results, brought about without calling on the religious principle. Most of us, I suppose, have our reserves about our actual civilisation; most of us, I should think, must have our misgivings and anxieties; but it seems beyond dispute that where we see justice, honesty, humanity, honour, the love of truth, and that moderation in word and act which is so akin to truth—where we see these things aimed at with no unsuccessful efforts, and, in spite of infinite failure and alloy, taking stronger hold

on society, we see what we ought to welcome and be thankful for; and it seems also beyond dispute that this kind of improvement goes on, and goes on with vigour, where it is often difficult to trace the influence of religion, and supports itself, as far as can be seen, independently of that influence, and without reference to its claims.

Accordingly, it may be said, and certainly is sometimes thought, that civilisation does all that Christianity claims to do. It is suggested or announced that society has outgrown Christianity; that whatever benefits it once derived from Christian ideas and motives it needs no longer; that even if it learned its lessons from Christianity, yet now it is able to walk alone, to judge and deal without its teacher; that there is nothing left for the Church to do, as a moral influence on society, but what can be as well or better done by other influences, not holding of religion, or, at any rate, of definite Christianity. The virtues which men want will now grow on their own roots; civilisation is become strong enough

to maintain itself, and to provide in the healthiest way for the perfection of human character.

It is a claim, as we know, which excites equally hopes and fears; hopes and fears, often, surely, far in excess of their grounds. This claim is sometimes met by the assertion that civilisation, as such, cannot do without Christianity; that owing so much to Christianity, it would ultimately lose, if parted from Christianity, even the virtues of its own proper sphere. It is likely. But forecasts of this sort are hazardous; and I am not so sure of this, as that I should like to venture on it the claim of Christianity to the continued allegiance of the world. Certainly the highest and most varied civilisation that men have ever known has not come into being without Christianity. But what it might do, when once started, is another matter. I think it is possible that very excellent things, planted in the first instance by Christianity, may yet thrive and grow strong, where there is little reference to their historical origin. Still less does it seem wise or right to rest on extreme and one-sided

statements of effects and tendencies, such as it is easy enough to make, either way; denunciations of what we fear, panegyrics of what we value. Alas! we have had too much experience of such expedients, and paid dearly for their hollowness. Let us keep from these rash contrasts, these rash disparagements, which provoke overwhelming rejoinders; rejoinders which derive their power, not from their intrinsic force and reason, but from their rhetorical truth and justice, as answers to exaggeration and over-statement. It is enough to say, that there are things of the deepest import to man and society which civilisation does not pretend to give, and which nothing can give but Christianity. Admit that society has learned a great deal; that, apart from the direct impulse of religion, it does a number of things well; that independently of religion, there are reasons and motives for high morality which are listened to and act powerfully: but when all is admitted, we are a long way from the conclusion that Christianity has nothing more to do, and that its significance and interest are

over. Put the improvement of society and its hopeful prospects at the highest. Assume, as it is most reasonable, that it is according to the order of Him who is Lord of the Ages, that truth and humanity and justice should grow and increase, even where His direct influence is unrecognised or unfelt. Yet that is not all that He came to claim of man and society, nor all that man is capable of being made. The Church is His witness to something more, even when courts and parliaments have learned to deal justly, rulers to govern in equity, men in general to be considerate and sincere, thinkers to value and toil for truth.

It would, indeed, be either very shallow or very faint-hearted—a great mistake, whoever makes it, whether from premature confidence in civilisation, or from short-sighted fears for religion—to think that as civilisation increases in vigour and range, and its inevitable consequences show themselves, it must displace Christianity, and narrow its influence. It is conceivable that the changes which are going on may make the work

of the Church more difficult: no doubt all changes have this, that they make some things difficult which were not so before. But things change for the easier as well as for the harder. We all of us have the benefit of the one law of change, as well as have to accept the necessities of the other. It is possible that mere civilisation may more and more do many things which in past times Christianity did; that it may assert its independence; that it may take things out of the hands of religion, which have hitherto been under its government. This may alter the form and direction of the work of religion; but it need not cripple it, as it certainly cannot exhaust its purpose and scope. Before now, civilisation, while raising the most formidable obstacles to Christianity, had already removed others as serious, and in almost equal degree made its way easier. Why should we not still look upon the civilisation of Christendom, as we are accustomed to look upon the civilisation of Heathenism, which we know to have been as much the minister as the antagonist of the

Gospel conquest? Why should we not be thankful that if it raises dangerous pretensions, it has broken up for us all much rugged soil, and tamed many of the old brutalities of man? Why should we be niggardly in confessing what it has done to our hands, in refining, ordering, calming? Ought we not to see in its conquests the opening of a new world to the inexhaustible energies and hopes of faith,—a new world, with its new dangers and troubles, but not without abundance to outweigh and reward them? As civilisation increases, makes things easier, does many things of its own accord that religion used to teach it, so the work of the Church is not superseded by all this: its sphere is widened; its tasks, it may well be, are increased; there is more to do, and perhaps some of the old facilities are removed; but others come in their place. If any of its old work is done to its hand, it is so far put more forward for higher functions; it may have to do different things and in a different way: but certainly its room is not occupied. If ever the Church was the salt of the earth,

the light of the world, the leaven of society, there is just as much place for it to be so still. The world still wants it; and it only can supply the want. Civilised society can do many things for itself which it could not do once; but there is much which it is not in the nature of things that it can do. Civilisation is the wisdom and the wit of this world; and its office is for this world. If it makes the best of this world, in the highest sense of the word, this is the utmost it can do. Beyond the present—and I include in this the futurity, as far as we can conceive it, of our condition here—it does not pretend to go. And when the perfection of our present state is arrived at, even if we could imagine the law of our intellectual and moral and civil perfection carried out far beyond what we have reached to yet, there would still remain something more. 'Man,' says Hooker, 'doth not seem to rest satisfied, either with fruition of that wherewith his life is preserved, or with performance of such actions as advance him most deservedly in estimation; but doth further covet, yea, oftentimes manifestly

pursue with great sedulity and earnestness, that which cannot stand him in any stead for vital use; that which exceedeth the reach of sense; yea, somewhat above capacity of reason, somewhat divine and heavenly, which with hidden exultation it rather surmiseth than conceiveth; somewhat it seeketh, and what that is directly it knoweth not, yet very intentive desire thereof doth so incite it, that all other known delights and pleasures are laid aside, they give place to the search of this but only suspected desire. If the soul of man did serve only to give him being in this life, then things appertaining unto this life would content him, as we see they do other creatures. . . . But with us it is otherwise. For although the beauties, riches, honours, sciences, virtues, and perfections of all men living, were in the present possession of one; yet somewhat beyond and above all this there would still be sought and earnestly thirsted for.'

In speaking of what Christianity has yet to do in civilised society, where high moral ideas have established themselves and bear fruit, I do not

now refer to what is of course at the bottom of all that it does—of that assumed foundation of fact and creed (without which Christianity is nothing), by which we believe and declare what God has done for the recovery of man, and which, whether in sight or only in the background, makes all the difference, as to the influence under which we live. I am not speaking of the example held up in making the great venture (for such it must be), that faith makes, as to what has been and what is to be; nor of the effects on men of such awful truths as those of which Christianity is the message, the truths connected with what we are at this season specially thinking of, the only truths that can bring light to pain and sorrow and ill-success, that conquer death, that can take the sting out of the irrevocable record of sin. These, it is plain, are what they are, whatever civilisation may come to. I am on much lower and narrower ground. I am quite aware that even that is too large for me here. We all know how hard it is to draw broad outlines, at once adequate and exact;

how, in general statements, qualifications and exceptions start up at every step, which need to be kept in view and allowed for: and broad outlines are all that are attempted now. Yet I will venture to notice generally one or two points which seem to me to open serious reflections; points in which any of us may see that Christianity is still wanted as the 'salt' and 'light' of society; points of great importance; points in which I cannot see that civilisation has anything to take the place of what Christianity does, or can pretend to make up for it, if it is away. I shall be only recalling familiar thoughts. But even very familiar thoughts may be worth recalling; and it is part of the business of this place to recall them.

1. We are in danger, even in the highest condition of civilisation, from the narrowing of man's horizon, and we need a protection against it which civilisation cannot give. I call a narrowing of man's horizon whatever tends to put or drop out of sight the supreme value of the spiritual part of man, to cloud the

thought of God in relation to it, or to obscure the proportion between what *is* and what we look forward to,—the temporary and provisional character of the utmost we see here. To have fought against and triumphed over this tendency is the great achievement of Christianity. We hardly have the measure to estimate the greatness of it; of having kept alive, through such centuries as society has traversed, the faith, the pure and strong faith, in man's divine relationship: of having been able to withstand the constant enormous pressure of what was daily seen and felt; not only of the solemn unbroken order of the natural world, but of the clogs and fetters of custom, of the maxims taken for granted in the intercourse of life, of the wearing down, the levelling of high thought and purpose which is always going on in society; of the perpetual recurrence, with the tides and weather, of the same story of promise and disappointment, of far-reaching attempts and poor success; of evil in high places; of the noble mingled with the vile; of good ever tending either to extravagance

or decay; of character in men or bodies of men insensibly deteriorating and falling away from its standard; of wisdom hardly won and wasted; of great steps taken and thrown away; of the old faults obstinately repeated in the face of ever-accumulating experience; of the bewildering spectacle of vice beyond hope and without remedy; of the monotonous dead level of the masses of mankind. For a religion to have been proof against all this,—still, through it all, to have preserved itself the same and unworn out, and still to be able to make men hold fast by faith and hope in the invisible, is, among the wonders of human history, one of the greatest and most impressive.

But the pressure is still going on; and to yield to it, and let that faith and hope pass from the common heritage, would be a disaster for which nothing conceivable could make up. There is still the weight of all we see and are accustomed to, making it unnatural to us to trust our spiritual ideas, calling for a strong effort to resist the spells of imagination, and to grasp

as real the convictions of reason about what we can never hope to see or test. There is still the inevitable temptation to make our experience—our one-sided experience, and accidental habits of thought—the measure of what is possible, the measure of the Eternal Laws of the Most High. Against this weight and pressure of the actual, the customary, the natural, civilisation, by itself, is not able to help us. For its main work and claim is to regulate this present scene. This is its confessed province; here is its glory and triumph. I am not forgetting the value of whatever strengthens character and refines thought. I do not forget the enlargement of even religious ideas as knowledge widens. I, for one, hope never to speak but with respect and the deepest thankfulness of that dispensation of order and light—no doubt with much of evil and danger, yet fruitful of blessings and bright with hope—under which God has appointed us at this day to live. But civilisation in its professed aim is content with the present; and they whom it monopolises will be content with it too. In its highest forms,

it is of the earth, earthy; mistress and minister of the truths and marvels of this earth, but, like this earth, only to last its time and pass away. And yet, *there is* 'the natural,' and *there is* 'the spiritual;' the First Man and the Second; the two ideals, man made for this life, and 'the Lord from heaven.' Against the tendency to look at everything from its own point of view it cannot protect us; and to confine ourselves to its point of view is to lose sight of all that is highest in man's reason, all that is noblest in man's hope. Every occupation, every province of human interest, has its special temptations to narrowness of view and shortness of thought. We are all accustomed to be told this about theology; and who can doubt its truth? But just as true is it that the same vice infests as deeply the generalisations of the philosopher and the judgments of the statesman. There are worthier and wider thoughts of God, the soul, man's calling and purpose, in the Psalms, than often under the highest light of modern culture; *it* could not produce them, and sometimes hardly

understands them. To pass to them from many a famous book of modern speculation, is like passing into the presence of the mountains and the waters and the midnight stars, from the brilliant conversation of one of our great capitals. There is no narrowing so deadly as the narrowing of man's horizon of spiritual things; no worse evil could befal him in his course here, than to lose sight of heaven. And it is not civilisation that can prevent this; it is not civilisation which can compensate for it No widening of science, no conquest,—I say not, over nature and ignorance, but over wrong and selfishness in society,—no possession of abstract truth, can indemnify us for an enfeebled hold on the highest and central truths of humanity. 'What shall a man give in exchange for his soul?'—the soul which feels itself accountable, that owns sin and aspires after goodness, which can love and worship God and hope for immortality; the soul which can rejoice with trembling in God's grace, and dare to look forward to be like Him. What is it which keeps alive this estimate of man's soul,

but that unearthly power which first proclaimed it to mankind?

2. Once more: we think much of purity, with all its consequences; that idea and family of thoughts, which is perhaps the most characteristic distinction between the old world of morality and feeling and the new; that idea, which, in its essential nature, apart from political necessities, or ceremonial restrictions, or social expediencies or tastes, we owe absolutely to the religion of the Bible; which had its birth for us in that wonderful mixture of severity with tenderness, of inexorable and exacting holiness with boundless pity for the sinner, tolerance for the weak, and welcome for the penitent, which marked the Son of Man; that most mysterious of the virtues, as its opposite is the most mysterious of the sins, which we have not yet found the way to talk much about, without danger to that which we most wish to guard. It is the flower of the Christian graces: witnessed by the care with which it has been fostered from the first; witnessed, alas! in other and sadder

ways, in the mistaken and wild expedients to cherish it, in the monstrous machinery brought into action to make up for the sluggishness or perversions of conscience, in the very magnitude of the scandals and shame inflicted on the Church, when the avowed ideal has cast a deeper shade on the bad and apostate life. The Christian idea of purity has still a hold on our society, imperfectly enough; but who can tell what it contributes to the peace, and grace, and charm, of what is so large a part of our earthly happiness? Can we ask a more anxious question than whether this hold will continue? No one can help seeing, I think, many ugly symptoms; the language of revolt is hardly muttered; the ideas of purity which we have inherited and thought sacred are boldly made the note and reproach of 'the Christians.' And—vital question as it is, one which, if solved in the wrong way, must, it is evident, in the long run be ruinous to society—yet there is no point of morality on which it is easier to sophisticate and confuse, easier to raise doubts of which it

is hard to find the bottom, or to make restraints seem the unwarrantable bonds of convention and caprice. It is eminently one of those things, as to which we feel it to be absolutely the law of our being as long as we obey, but lose the feeling when we do not obey. Civilisation in this matter is by itself but a precarious safeguard for very sacred interests. By itself, it throws itself upon nature, and in some of its leading and most powerful representatives, looks back to paganism. It goes along with Christianity as to justice and humanity; but in the interest of individual liberty it parts company here. What trenches on and endangers ideas of purity, it may disapprove, but it declines to condemn or brand. At least, it does not condemn, it does not affect to condemn, in the sense in which religion condemns; in the sense in which, *with* religion, it condemns injustice, cruelty, and falsehood. It is too much to hope that civilisation by itself will adopt and protect these ideas. And the passions which assail them are not among those which wear out with civilisation and tend to extinc-

tion; they are constant forces, and as powerful as they are constant. Argument is hardly a match for them. They are only to be matched successfully by a rival idea, a rival fire, the strength of a rival spring of feeling with its attractions and antipathies, a living law and instinct of the soul. Civilisation supplies none such but what it owes to Christianity. Purity is one of those things which Christian ideas and influences produced; it is a thing which they alone can save.

Here seem to be two points in which civilisation by itself cannot guarantee us from great loss; instances in which is manifest the need for a 'salt,' a 'light' of the world, higher than what anything of this world can give. If there are great functions which civilised society takes over from the Church, there are others which none but the Church can discharge; which, without the Church, are lost to mankind. And, at the same time, there is no reason why, if *ever* the Church discharged them, it should not now. Here is our hope and our responsibility. When we

talk of the influences of Christianity on society, we use large and vague words, which we are not perhaps always able to explain and develope; but there is one form and element of this influence which is not too subtle and fugitive for us to grasp. The influence of a system is brought to a point in the personal influence of individuals. It is not by any means the whole, or perhaps the greatest part of that influence; but it is the most definite and appreciable part. When men live as they think, and translate ideas into realities, they make an impression corresponding to the greatness of the ideas, and the faithfulness and intensity of their embodiment in life. 'Ye are the salt of the earth;' 'Ye are the light of the world:' so it was said at first; so it is now. Truth, incorporate in human character, allying itself with human feeling and human self-devotion, acting in human efforts, is what gains mankind. In the great movements of the past, as in what is around us now, we are often baffled, when we attempt to compare and distinguish, amidst the vast play of forces. But

when the course of things has been turned, whatever is intricate and confused, we can seldom miss the men who, by what they were, turned it; indeed it is almost appalling to observe how it has often hung on the apparent accident of a stronger character or a weaker, one equal to the occasion or unequal to it, on some great unfaithfulness which lost the game, or some energetic conviction which won it, whether some vast change should be or not. When everything has been in favour of a cause,—reason, truth, human happiness,—only dearth of character has ruined it. There are many things which we have not in our hands; what we have is this, whether we will act out our belief. Our heart sometimes fails us when we contemplate the new world of civilisation and discovery. What are we to do against the advancing tide of what seems to us unfriendly thought, so impetuous, yet so steady and so wide? There are reasons for looking forward to the future with solemn awe. No doubt signs are about us, which mean something which we dare scarcely breathe. The

centre of gravity, so to speak, of religious questions has become altogether shifted and displaced. Anchors are lifting everywhere, and men are committing themselves to what they may meet with on the sea. But awe is neither despair nor fear; and Christians have had bad days before. *Passi graviora.* A faith which has come out alive from the darkness of the tenth century, the immeasurable corruption of the fifteenth, the religious policy of the sixteenth, and the philosophy, commenting on the morals, of the eighteenth, may face without shrinking even the subtler perils of our own. Only let us bear in mind, that it is not an abstraction, a system, or an idea, which has to face them; it is *we who believe.* The influence of the Church on society means, in its ultimate shape, the influence of those who compose it. The Christian Church is to be the salt of the nations, if Christians are true to their belief and equal to their claim; nothing can make it so, nothing can secure that what has been, shall be, if they are not. And so we are brought back to the secret which our Lord's

words intimate; the great secret of personal influence; the key of great movements; the soul of all that is deep and powerful, both in what lasts and in what makes change. It is of infinitely less consequence what others are and do against us, and what we do to resist and defeat them, than what we *are* as Christians ourselves. We ask a great thing, when we talk of influencing the world; let us believe that it imposes obligation, and must have its cost. Our Master's sentence, 'Ye are the salt of the earth, ye are the light of the world,' has been before now the bitterest of sarcasms, the deepest of shames. The wrath and scorn of men have trodden under foot, as He said, the salt that had lost its savour; and when the light became darkness, it has been darkness indeed. May we try so to live, that these words may not ring in our ears and thoughts as a mockery, or what is worse, a hollow, self-complacent boast. Let us hear in them our Lord's claim on us. How each generation fulfils this call can never be known to itself; it must be left to the judg-

ment of posterity and the account of the Great Day. But we have in them the announcement that to the personal influence of Christians our Lord commits His cause; in personal influence His Church was founded, and by this it was to stand. May we never forget, amidst the contests and searchings of heart round us, that these words are the measure of what we were meant to be; the standard by which we shall all be tried.

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